P IV

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Kitab Mahal Series of English Literature

ARNOLD'S

THYRSIS

WITH

Introduction, Explanatory Notes, Paraphrase, Questions & Answers

BY

Dr. S. K. Banerji, M.A., Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Life of Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold was born on December 24, 1842, at Lalcham, near Staines. He was the eldest son among the nine children of Thomas (later Dr.) Arnold who, about six years after the poet's birth, became Headmaster of Rugby in 1828. When the poet was born, his father was coaching private pupils at home after eight years of Oxford life. Matthew was first sent to Winchester—his father's old school—but a year later in August 1837, he was transferred to Rugby where he was educated under his father's care from 1837 to 1841 It was the year when his friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, left Rugby to join the Belliol College at Oxford. While at Rugby, Arnold wrote his prize-poem, *Alaric at Rome*, which was a frank imitation of Byron's *Childe Harold*. He won a Balliol scholarship in 1840 and 1841 went into residence at Oxford. Having secured the Newdigate Prize for English verse with a poem, *Cromwell*, he passed to Oriel and was thereafter elected a Fellow in 1845. A year after he had gone into residence at Balliol, his father died ; "but the memory and influence of Dr. Arnold remained always with his son to prompt and cheer him in the path of duty." Although the father and the son were unlike in many respects, the former had an abiding influence on the latter. Throughout his Rugby years Thomas Arnold was admittedly a leader not only in the religious and political conflict of England but also in the conflict between the old and the new. "In that struggle Thomas Arnold forged the attitudes which were to be the greater part of his intellectual legacy to Matthew."
Matthew watched his father's struggles, beliefs uncertainties and triumphs with precocious eyes. Thus, under the shadow of a man so notable, so strong, so decided, so confused, so

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1. Lional Trilling : *Matthew Arnold*, p. 44

representative of the age of unrest as Thomas Arnold, the youth of Matthew Arnold was spent."[2] The poet himself paid a beautiful tribute to his indebtedness to his illustrious father in his poem, *Rugby Chapel.*

Matthew's mother, Mary Penrose, was a woman of great charm and intellect. Advancing years increased her charm. When her husband died in 1842, their home continued to be an intellectual centre it had always been during his life-time. She never lost touch with the intellectual life of the day till her death in 1876. Matthew's letters to his mother show that he always consider her to be his intellectual equal.[3] It will not be exravagant to say that Matthew inherited from his mother elements and qualities which were lacking in the strong personality of his father, *viz.* imagination, "rebellion against fact," spirituality, a tendency to dream, other worldliness, the passionate love of beauty and charm, "ineffectualness" in the practical competitive life and a certain melancholy. Many biographers of Matthew Arnold ascribe his poetic temperament to his mother. Dr. Arnold, his father, was more remarkable for his force of character than force of intellect, his patience, deliberate flexibility, grasp of detail love of independence, not too ready for abstract thought."[4] Matthew undoubtedly inherited many of these qualities from his father.

While at Oxford, he was perhaps not so very studious, for he obtained only a second class in the Classics, The dignity of Oxford did not seem to impress young Arnold with the need for gravity of manner or purpose. But it was his gay and sparkling temperament, leavened with a social charm which won for him the friendship of Arthur Hugh Clough in 1845. Clough was his senior by three years at Rugby and was one of the pupils of Dr. Arnold. Clough entered Balliol College, Oxford, in 1837. Latterly, he became Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College, which he subsequently left on account of his religious difficulties.

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2. *Op cit.*, p. 72.
3. *Op. cit.*, p. 44.
4. H. Ellis : *A Study of English Geniue.*

Thus Arnold and Clough were both together at Oxford till about 1848 when Clough left Oxford. Clough's death at Florence in 1861 was in subsequent years to inspire Matthew to compose his famous poem, *viz.*, *Thyrsis* (1867), and to his friendship we owe his *Scholar Gipsy* (1853). Both the poems were reminiscent of country scenes roundabout Oxford, which the two friends loved passionately. In the long roll of English literary history there are many poets "who pass through one or other of the Universities", but Arnold was perhaps the only one who was "the personification of choice academic tradition"[5] associated with Oxford. Indeed, few English poets have summed up the peculiar charm of Oxford better than Arnold :

> "Beautiful city ! so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene ! There are young barbarians, all at play ! And yet, steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantment of the Middle Ages, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm, keeps ever calling us nearer to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection—to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side ! Nearer, perhaps, than all the science of Tubingen. Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic ! who has given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and heroes not mine, only never to the Philistines ! home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties !"

Arnold had a great passion for Oxford and the country round, like Wordsworth who had a peculiar fascination for the Lake District or Hardy for Wessex, reflected in his Wessex novels. "It had long been in my head to connect Clough with that Cumner country", the poet wrote in a letter to his friend, J. G. Sharp. "Matthew Arnold was conscious that in *Thyrsis*, he had too much left out Clough" and that his real object was to delineate

5. A. Compton-Rickett : *A History of English Literature*, p. 464.

living scenes round-about Oxford, based on his personal observation. In Arnold's University days Oxford was bustling with many kinds of activities. Soon however, this serene seat of intellectual culture was disturbed by theological controversies which go by the name of "Oxford Movement." Clough was deeply influenced by these controversies whereas Arnold was not much affected by them. Clough resigned his post as Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College on account of his religious difficulties and left the University in disgust.

In 1845 Arnold accepted a temporary post as fifth-form Master at Rugby. In 1847, he became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, President of the Council in Lord John Russel's cabinet. Lord Lansdowne's official duties included those of the present Minister of Education. So he got him appointed as Inspector of Schools in 1851. Before this appointment he published anonymously his first volume poems, *viz.*, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems by* " " which, however, did not receive much recognition although a few discerning readers saw in them some promise and proofs of poetic power. The same year he married Frances Lucy Wightman, daughter of Justice Wightman. It is really very strange that the first anonymous volume of poems which included his famous *Sonnet to Shakespeare* and the beautiful lyric. *The Forsaken Merman*, among others, should not have received recognition by the reading public, for which Arnold had to witadraw the volume in some disappointment. In 1852 he gain published a second volume of poems, *Empedocles on Etna and other Poems* still by "*A*" which too had to be withdrawn from circulation although it included some of his best works in verse, *viz.*, *Tristram and Iseult*, *A Summer Night*, etc In 1853 he made bold to come out in his own name and published a new volume of poems, *Poems by Matthew Arnold* which included many of the poems of the earlier volumes together with the epical fragment, *Sohrab and Rustam* and *The Scholar Gipsy*. It contained a preface which was "an extremely noteworthy discussion of poetry, the first of his attempts as critical

disquisition."[6] In 1865 appeared another volume containing *Balder Dead*, an epic in the classical style and several reprints. In 1857 he published *Merope*, at tragedy on the Greek model. After this he made no ambitious poetic effort on a large scale, excepting only one other volume of verse (1867).

In 1857 Arnold was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He continued in this post till 1862 and in the meantime he went as Commissioner on Education to enquire into the state of elementary education and then again of secondary education in the Continent. He brought about some valuable reforms as a pioneer of popular education. He was the "father" of the University Extension Movement. To him is also ascribed the development of London University as a teaching institution. His reports on his official visits to continental schools and universities were full of valuable suggestions. Through his lectures on poetry to the students of the Oxford University he came to wield an enormous influence on the younger generation of Englishmen. But it was not until 1865 that he first became well-known outside the academic world by the publication of the first series of *Essays in Criticism*. "Perhaps the chief service that he rendered in this respect was to persuade his countrymen to give up their narrow provincialism and to surrender themselves consciously to the influence of France and Germany,—to France in the domain of literature, and to Germany in regard to politics. He passionately deplored the disorganised mind of the typical Englishman ; he held up before them the clarity and precision of the French and the discipline of the Germans."[7] After 1867 he rarely wrote poetry and devoted himself to critical, social and religious subjects which were written in so excellent a style and matter that they over-shadowed his poetry. In 1869 appeared his *Culture and Anarchy*, a provocative series of brilliantly written essays on the socio-political problems of the day. In this he propounded for the first time his idea of "culture" as a

6. Saintsbury : *Short History of English Literature*, p. 75.
7. "*Eight Poets*", edited by D. N. Ghosh (Oxford), p. 204.

cure for the "anarchy" of thought and ideas of his times and pleaded for "sweetness and light." In 1886 Arnold resigned his position as an Inspector of Schools. He now brought out two of his important works of criticism. *viz.*, *On Translating Homer* (1861), *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) and *Literature and Dogma* (1873) which are admittedly some of his best contributions to the prose literature of the Victorian era. In (1883) a pension of £ 250 was conferred on him through the influence of Gladstone. But he did not live long to enjoy retirement. He died suddenly in Liverpool in April, 1888. Soon after his death a second series of *Essays in Criticism* was published.

Chief Works :—

(*a*) *Poetry* : Strayed Reveller (1849) ; Empedocles on Etna (1852); Poems (1853) ; Poems, Second Series (1855) ; Merope (1858) ; New Poems, (1869) ; Collected Poems (1877).

(*b*) *Literary Criticisms* : On Translating Homer (1861); Essays in criticism (1865) ; Mixed Essays (1866) ; Celtic Literature (1867) ; Essays in Criticism, Second Series, (1868).

(*c*) *Miscellaneous Criticisms* : Culture and Anarchy, (1869) ; Friendship's Garland (1871); Literature and Dogma (1873) ; Discourses in America (1885).

2. Life of Clough

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61) was educated at Rugby where he was senior to Arnold by three years and a pupil of Dr. Arnold. In 1837 he passed on to Balliol College, Oxford, where latterly he became Fellow and Tutor. Arnold and Clough were associated together at Oxford from 1845 to about 1848 in their student life as well as in their subsequent career. In the familiar grounds of Oxford they tried their hands at the composition of poetry for the first time in their life and the poet also happened to defeat

Clough in poetic contests. Soon, the storm of religious Controversy that began to rage at Oxford disturbed the placid atmosphere of the University. Many students and teachers, including Clough, were swept away by the theological storm known as Oxford Movement. Clough was affected by it and he continued to write poetry, his subsequent poetry struck a deep note of melancholy reflecting the spiritual doubts of the age and the agony of his sensitive soul. So Clough threw up his fellowship and left Oxford in disgust. His poems, *Amours de Voyage* and *Dipsychus*, reflect his troubled spirit and the intellectual atmosphere of his age; whereas his "long-vacation pastoral", *The Bothie of Tohewna-Virolich* is remarkably free from the melancholy note, being full of delightful pictures of nature—of the Highlands of Oxford. Along with this poem Clough also published some fine lyries including the well-known "Say not the struggle nought availeth", which bear the mark of spiritual agitation caused by religious doubts. It is remarkable that, while Clough was deeply affected by the theological storm, the Oxford or Tractarian Movement, led by Cardinal Newman, left Arnold rather cold.

After leaving his fine position, that of Tutorship and Fellowship of Oriel College at Oxford, Clough left and became Principal of University Hall, London. Thereafter he lef for the continent for reasons of health and ultimately died at Florence in 1861.

3. Occasion for the Composition of 'Thyrsis'.

Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis* was written ostensibly to commemorate Clough's death but his real object was to deal with scenes of their jocuned youthful time,—the rude Cumner ground, its fir-topped Hurst, its farm, its quiet fields."[8] "*Thyrsis* is the lament for a dear friend but also for a dead friendship........Arnold feared his friends and kept them off—feared even Clough at times nearly as much as any of them and as nearly as 1848 considered attenuating the friendship. He gave up the idea at the time but

8. Arnold's letter to J. C. Sharp.

the relationship certainly grew less and less fertile until by 1853 it was an affectionate 'formality'......He perceived in Clough the driving restless movement of the critical intellect trying to solve the problems of the 19th century."[9] Arnold did not like Clough's poetry and told him so. According to him, Clough mistook the whole function and method of poetry. Clough's was the way of the admirable *man* but not the way of the *artist*. "I doubt your being an artist," said Arnold. He declared, "Clought s poetry, whatever its virtues of sincerity or of fine thought, is not beautiful and gives no pleasure. It is perfectly apparent where the trouble lies in Clough : he has made too great a commitment to the critical intellect ." Thus very soon it was apparent that the rift between the two friends widened and was a real one.

4. 'Thyrsis' as a Memorial Poem

After Clough's death on November 13, 1861, Arnold paid a tribute to his memory in his lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. In this lecture he praised Clough for the "Homeric simplicity of his literary life" by which perhaps he meant Clough's "selfless devotion to literature, free from any professional motive."[10] But when Mrs. Clough requested him to contribute an obituary notice to the columns of '*The Daily News*', he declined, adding that "in some way or other I shall relieve myself of what I think of him." He even avoided writing a memoir for Mrs. Clough's edition of her husband's prose pieces. Evidently for five years after Clough's death he was reading up pastoral poems of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus on which he modelled his *Thyrsis*. But his indebtedness to these models does not extend beyond the name of the title of the poem *Thyrsis* and to other names of Shepherds, Corydon and Daphnis, and direct references to ninth, tenth and nineteenth stanzas. But in other essential matters, *viz.*, the local colour, the thought-structure the music. attitude to nature, love of flowers and of familiar hill sides, love of botany, the images of the poem—all these were Arnold's

9. Trilling ; *Matthew Arnold* p.p. 24-25.
10. B.R. Mullik : *Matthew Arnold*, p. 35.

own. "The images of the poem, as he himself remarks, are English and are based on his personal observation. But the diction of the poem—the straightforward unadorned style of the rural idylls of Theocritus—was perhaps modelled on that of Theocritus."

It was the truth of the scenes described in the poem which gives to it an element of beauty which is wanting in other elegies. Hinksey and Cumner, the region round about Oxford, which is no woven into the texture of *Thyrsis* as also *The Scholar Gipsy*, are not exactly beauty spots that endear themselves to a poet but Arnold has made these familiar grounds a living scene by virtue of his art. *Thyrsis* was composed at a time when Arnold's poetic powers were already intermittent, and had started flagging. It is doubtful if he could achieve such a brilliant success in *Thyrsis* had it not been for the fact that he was almost reverting to almost the same subject.[11] The poem may thus be very appropriately described as the "memorial of a vanished youth and of a nearly vanished mood not less than of a vanished friend."[12]

Arnold himself was very conscious of the fact that, as a memorial poem, *Thyrsis* fails because not much is said in it about Clough. Thus he wrote to J. C. Sharp in a letter : "There is much in Clough (the whole *prophet* side, in fact) which one cannot deal w th in this way ; and one has the feeling, if one reads the poem as a memorial poem, that not enough is said about Clough in it. I feel this so much that I do not send the poem to Mrs. Clough. Still Clough had this idyllic side too : to deal with this suited my desire to deal again with the Cumner country, anyway, only so could I treat the matter this time."

5. Style of the poem

The poetic style of *Thyrsis* has distinctive qualities, all its own, which are shared by all the rest of his poems. Arnold always writes in a style which is marked by classical severity and polish along with lucidity and grace.

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11. Garrod : *Poetry and The Criticism of Life*, p. 62.
12. Trilling : *Matthew Arnold*, p. 298.

He always avoids lyrical effusions and outbursts and the cloudy subjectivity of the romantics always presenting his ideas and images in their clearest outline, and insisting on truth in his diction and the imagery of his poetry. "He was principally moved by a sense of tears in mortal things, by a hunger of the soul for a sustaining religion and knowledge—always yearning for spiritual calm and poise." Some of the special features of his poem are present in *Thyrsis* as well as in his *The Scholar Gipsy*—his wistful melancholy, his disappointment over the frustration of modern life his longing for 'sweetness and light', his yearning for a spiritual calm and poise, his solution for the frustrations and inadequacies of the modern age in the quiet beauty of Nature—are all happily blended in this pastoral elegy. His quest for 'a fugitive and gracious light' to the rigid exclusion of 'place and honour, houses and gold' and anything else that is in the world's market bought and sold is perhaps the special characteristic of *Thyrsis*. This is the "criticism of life" *Thyrsis* offers.

"The principal defect of the poem," he wrote, "was perhaps its too pervasive elegance. Even so I am persuaded that it is a poem less great than any of the three with which it is natural to compare." "Too quiet a poem for the general taste," Matthew Arnold writes of it, "but I think it will stand wear." With these last words he judged its character truly—I should make bold to say of it that it has 'stood wear' better than any poem written in the last hundred years."[13] "If *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* had no other merits, yet their art in landscape, and the fine sentiment with which they particularise, with which they fix natural details—these two talents alone—might vindicate for Matthew Arnold a place with the greatest poets."[14]

Both in *The Scholar Gipsy* as well as in *Thyrsis*, Arnold sought relief and solace in the political world of the pastoral from the doubts and distractions of his age and the frustrations of a greedy impulsiveness, peculiar to the world of

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13. Garrod : *Poetry and the Criticism of Life*.
14. *Op. cit*.

progress and inventions. The country dear to him was a very quiet country and from such a quiet region—the topographical background provided by Oxford country—he sought a sort of cool refreshment. "And the quietness of his vision is enhanced by the quality of his verse—its simplicity, lucidity, straightforwardness, its liberalness —its polished grace of a severely chiselled classicism." (—*Chambers*)

6. Chief Characteristics of Arnold as a Poet

(a) His scepticism : Arnold was the most thoughtful of the Victorian poets. He felt the difficulty of life in

"this our time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears"

more keenly than any of his contemporaries. It is important to understand this for a just appraisal of his poetry and the 'criticism of life' it offers. He belonged to a crucial age of modern civilisation and he believed that it was his function as a poet to interpret the inner meaning and significance of the modern spirit. "He had none of the complacency and facile optimism which may be found in the material progress of the age. Like Carlyle, he placed emphasis on things of the intellect and of the spirit, and consequently he saw in his age no progress, neither and cause of hope in this

"strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, and divided airs,
Its heads o'er-tax'd, its palsied hearts."

Like Carlyle again, he valued faith above everything else, but he could find no faith to satisfy him. The orthodox creeds which had satisfied his father crumbled when tested, as he had learnt to do from that same father in the faithful service of truth."[15] More than any other poet of the Victorian era Arnold was shaped by the influences of his age—the spiritual and mental distress of the modern man. Thus his position among his contemporaries was a place of singular distinction, because his poems, though smaller in volume and less varied in interest and range than

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15. Wyatt & Clay : *History of English Literature*, p. 506.

Tennyson and Browning, reflect the intellectual and spiritual distress of the nineteenth century. "In fact, his poetry is the roundest and most complete expression of this particular phase of nineteenth century thought which may be described very appropriately by the word "scepticism." He was critical rather than emotional, intellectual rather than passionate, reflective rather than sentimental as a cumulative result of various factors, *viz.*, his temperament, the teaching and example of his father, the light and sanction of reason and by his scholarship.

(b) His intellectualism : Intellectualism was predominant in his poetry throughout. He wrote like a scholar for scholars. No modern poet appeals so exclusively to the cultivated taste of the highly educated and thoughtful section of mid-Victorian society. The passion we find expressed in Arnold's poetry is not of the emotional type but it is the passion of the intellect. He did not surrender himself to the unpremeditated lyrical outbursts of Shelley, though it would be a mistake to characterise his poetry as an expression of intellectual apprehension, *i. e.*, "the poetry of a critic." Some of his poems are too lucidly sad or too palpably meditative to be classed as pure lyrics. "His 'second thoughts' ran always on the riddle of this painful earth." "He was too often moved by a sense of tears in mortal things, by a hunger of the soul for a sustaining religion and knowledge and an yearning for spiritual calm and poise."[16] His intellectualism shook the very foundations of his belief in the divinity of Christ and his scepticism failed to see any good in the materialism of the age. Some of his lyrics do offer proofs of his emotional nature but in such cases it is noticed that there is no lyrical effusion, as the intellectual element invariably keeps the passion or emotion under restraint. "Although his verse consists mainly of short poems, we do not think of him as primarily or pre-eminently, a lyric poet. Indeed, there is scarcely any poem by him which is felt to be an outburst of unpremeditated, careless lyric rapture. There is doubtless, an emotion of the

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16. Banerji : *Leaves from English Poetry*, p. 323.

intellect," which finds as glowing an utterance in lyric poetry as the emotion of the heart ; but it does not touch us in quite the same way."[17] But in the main it is true to say that Arnold is much too intellectual to submit himself to a spontaneous lyrical abandon in poetry and nearly all his poems (with the single exception of *The Forsaken Merman*) are the expressions of an intellectual emotion arising out of man's sad mortality the failure of modern man to adjust himself to the socio-economic environment of the day, "the hunger of the human spirit for a sustaining religion and yearning for spiritual calm and poise." It is only when he leaves aside his intellectualism or forgets about it in the warmth of a lyrical effusion as in the last stanza of *The Forsaken Merman*. that he comes out as one of the very best poets of the first rank.

(c) **His melancholy and elegiac poetry :** A note of melancholy strikes us in all his poetry. He was a man who was easily moved by "a sense of tears in mortal things." He is admittedly the greatest elegiac poet in the English language. "His poetry, profoundly melancholy, runs from the world, runs from it, as I think, hurt, hurt in some vital part. It believes itself able to sustain life only in the shade."[18] He found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of mortal destiny. It is the natural tone of an agnostic who is not jubilant, but regretful of the vanished faith,—regretful of its beauty, and regretful of the lost promise......In both *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* the real theme is the condition of modern life, its feverishness, its 'sick hurry' and its 'divided aims' ...They are the voice of a spirit almost beneath the burden of life. Hence Arnold's grave rebuke in verse of the materialistic spirits, his plea for gentleness and quiet as against bustling energy, 'trenchant force and will like a dividing spear'. It is this which attracts him to the monastic life and brings from him a momentary cry for shelter in the cloister—

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17. Dr. Johnson in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.
18. Garrod : *Poetry and The Criticism of Life*.

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
Ye solemen seats of holy pain !
Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
Till I possess my soul again.[19]

He believed he was "standing between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." Critical and intellectual as he undoubtedly was, he believed in a philosophy of life which found solace and comfort in the quiet resignation of the soul, amusing one out of two forms, *viz.*, the somewhat ignoble resignation of the cloister and the stoic resignation, inspired by a sense of duty unhelped by any hope of reward, and arising out of contemplation of man's destiny from "the hopeless tangle" of his own age and from "the course of the life of mortal men on the earth." He was, therefore, a poet of pessimism. "His poems breathe the characteristic pessimism of the burgeois illusion, which is now working out its final and (to itself) tragic stages." It was "the result of an intellectual isolation from the society around him and an inability to discover new contacts, to overcome his isolation."

(d) Poetry as "Criticism of Life" : Arnold looked at the moral and spiritual condition of the men of his age from his intellectual standpoint. This is why he was led to take a rather narrow view of poetry which he said is a transcript of experience or interpretation of life and as such, it cannot but be grounded in morality. This definition of poetry as "Criticism of Life" seems to overemphasis the underlying morality of all great poetry and to narrow down the range of poetry, for great poetry may also deal with non-moral ideas. It was the duty of the poet "to see life steadily and see it whole" so as to bring out a proper understanding and integration of the complex modern life. "He was dissatisfied with contemporary poetry because it got lost 'in parts and episodes and ornamental work,' was unable to 'press forward to the whole'. The achievement of an aesthetic wholeness depends upon the achievement of a philosophic wholeness".[20] "In all

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19. Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*
20. Thrilling : *Matthew Arnold.*

his deepest poems, in *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy*, in *Resignation*, in the *Obermann* poems, in *A Southern Night*, Arnold is passing judgement on the life and his age. the life of his country, the lives of individual men."[21] "It is as the poet and critic, the man who practised what he preached, that he survives. He was an incarnate contradiction of the false epigram that the critics are those who have failed in literature and art."[22] It has sometimes been said that his poetry is the poetry of a critic. He was undoubtedly a critic of a literature but his poetry cannot be said to be the poetry of a critic, for "the critic in him was distinct from the poet in him, though sometimes the one aided and acted in unison with the other."

(e) His Classicism : He was a thorough-going classicist and his bent of mind and mental habits led him to admire the ancient Greeks and love shapeliness, restraint, order, clarity, simplicity and elegance. His style of writing was marked by classical severity and polish along with lucidity, restraint and proportion. Like the romantics he did not surrender himself to lyrical abandon or effusions. But poetry is the expression of a genuine and sincere emotion, not of an intellectual apprehension. He was himself a learned classical scholar. "Not since Milton has there been any English poet more deeply imbued with the classical spirit." His similes are also of the Greek epic type and he is fond of using Homeric similes. Acting on classical principles he wrote the epic fragment *Sohrab and Rustum*, his more ambitious epics, *Balder Dead* and, last of all, his classical tragedy, *Merope*. The poem which closely follows principles of classical art laid down in the preface, is his *Sohrab and Rustum*, which is the most finished and successful of his narrative poems. But his best poems are those in which "he discards, or at any rate conveniently forgets, his theories" or are better on the theories he combated than on the theories he held."[23] Some of his best poems are saturated with romanticism.

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21. Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*
22. Trilling : *Matthew Arnold*, p. 177.
23. Saintsbury : *Short History of English Literature*, p. 775.

In his *The Forsaken Merman* he embarks on a lyric of exquisite emotion of a forlorn husband lamenting the description of his cruel wife who has left him and their children desolate, though in form he shows the perfection of classicism even here.

(f) His attitude to Nature : "For Arnold, Nature's secret was not 'joy' but 'peace'." He loved Nature and looked upon Nature with the same attitude of contemplation, drawing 'cool' refreshment, the same eye for picturesque vividness as Wordsworth, although he never spiritualised Nature, nor did he ever contemplate on Nature's moral ministry to man. "Thus it is that we find in *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* many strange landscapes, alien skies, pictures of the gliding Thames, the wide flowery meadows, the grey villages and gentle hills and many other lovely English scenes, all based on accurate and personal observation. In *Thyrsis* he paints, for instance, the most accurate picture of 'some tempestuous morn in early June' in the following lines :

> So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
> When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
> Before the roses and the longest day—
> When garden-walks and all the grassy floor,
> With blossoms red and white of fallen May
> And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
> So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
> From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,
> Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :
> The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I !

"The country dear to the poet was very quiet country."[24] Hinksey and Cumner, the haunts of his youth, were not what are called beauty spots but merely uplands of ancient pasture : yet these are the scenes which he loved to idealise in his *Thyrsis*. He found his haven of rest from the doubts and distractions of his age only in the quiet beauty of Nature, although like the romantics, he never sought "refuge in the ivory tower of a self-satisfied communion with Nature."

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24. Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era*.

(g) His limitations : Arnold is "like a starry night with a touch of frost" for his poetry is statuesque, austere, polished and severely chiselled and free from lyrical outbursts. In respect of passion, it may be said that this element is not totally absent from his poetry but it is subordinated to his intellect. The colour in which he delights is all subdued and cold. Besides, there is no movement in his poetry. He believed that man can get peace and repose in the abounding life and quiet beauty of Nature, which is eternal as against the frustrations of human life on earth, which is transient and futile. *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* are the poems which reveal most of his mind.

7. **Analysis of 'Thyrsis' :**

(a) Verses 1—5 : The *motif* is *grief*—

1. A sad change over man-made things, associated with his friend, Clough, in the midst of the immutability of Nature (1).
2. The poet's difficulty in recognising familiar landmarks especially the elm-tree (considered by him and his friend as emblematic of the immortality of the Gipsy-Scholar) after long absence since his death (2-3).
3. They made their first attempts at pastoral poetry in these grounds but since his death his poetic power has flagged (4).
4. Clough (his friend) loved Oxford and its people but when a bitter religious controversy raged over the place, he left in disgust and ultimately died (5).

(b) Verses (6—8) : The *motif* still continues to be *grief*—

1. Like the cuckoo leaving England with the passing of spring, Clough left the world never more to return (6).
2. Soon Nature will reapper in her finest form of loveliness and the cuckoo will return with the advent of spring but Thyrsis will not come back for Time has conquered him (7-8).

(c) **Verses 9—11 :** The *motif* still continues to be *grief*—

Since his sorrow will not recall him to life, he will try to immortalise his friend through an elegy, as Moschus, the Sicilian poet, did because familiar with the Oxford country where they lived together (9-11).

(d) **Verses 12—13 :** The *motif* is *grief* again—

1. A glory and a light have passed away from natural objects by the death of his friend. Much has changed. The primroses remain only in the hidden sides of the brook (12).
2. The poet recalls memories of a boating excursion with his friend. All the human figures associated with this trip are all gone and so is his friend (13).

(e) **Verses 14—15 :** The *motif* is the *pessimism of the poet* and his *longing for death* and *pensive melancholy*—

1. Now that his friend is dead and gone, the poet feels that the shadow of death is slowly creeping upon him (14).
2. The way to Truth which seemed short and easy, appears to be beyond his reach. So he feels he would seek rest in death (15).

(f) **Verses 16—19 :** The *motif* is *joy and triumph*—

1. The joy of discovery of the elm-tree, so long lost sight of, fills his mind with hope and he shouts to his friend to tell him about it (16-17).
2. The next moment he is reminded that his friend is lying buried in the Arno valley from where he cannot hear the poet, who has the consolation that his friend is now mingled with the great Mother (18-19).

(g) **Verses** 20—21 : The *motif* is *triumph* and *consolation*—

1. Though all alone, he will not give himself up to despair so long as the elm-tree (symbol of immortality of the Gipsy-Scholar) stands (20).

2. Like the Gipsy-Scholar, the poet will seek Truth. The Gipsy-Scholar left the society of men to seek Truth and so will be driven by an inner urge (21).

(h) **Verses** 22—24 : The *motif* is *consolation and triumph*—

1. The life of his friend was dedicated to Truth and he developed his highest poetic power in Cumner and the Oxford country (22).

2. But the religious controversy of his later years at Oxford gave a troubled note to simplicity and reshness of his pastoral poetry. He continued his quest till he died leaving the poet alone (23).

3. The poet now lives in the busy haunts of men but he still listens to the whispering voice of *Thyrsis* calling upon him to continue search for Truth till death.

(c) Verses 20—21 : The mood is *[illegible]* and *consolatory*.

1. Though all alone, he will not give himself up to despair so long as the elm-tree (symbol of immortality of the Gipsy-Scholar) stands (20).

2. Like the Gipsy-Scholar, the poet will seek Truth. The Gipsy-Scholar left the society of men to seek Truth and so will he [illegible] by his inner urge (21).

(b) Verses 22—24 : The mood is *[illegible]* and *[illegible]*.

1. The life of his friend was dedicated to Truth and he developed his highest poetic power in Cumnor and the Oxford country (22).

2. But the religious controversy of his last years at Oxford gave a troubled note to simplicity and sweetness of his pastoral poetry. He continued his quest till he died leaving the poet alone (23).

3. The poet now lives in the busy haunts of men but he still listens to the whispering voice of Thyrsis calling upon him to continue search for Truth till death.

THYRSIS

A Monody, *to commemorate the author's friend,*
Arthur High Clough, *who died at*
Florence, 1861.

1

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills !
In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same ;
The village street its haunted mansion lacks,
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks—
Are ye too changed, ye hills ?
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men
To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays !
Here came I often, often, in old days—
Thyrsis and I ; we still had Thyrsis then.

Haunted—frequented. **Sign**—sign-board. **Sibylla**—hostess of the inn.

Gist. Visiting Oxford and the country-side after the death of Clough, it occurs to the poet that man-made things should have undergone a sad change while the age-old hills still stand. Here he and Thyrsis used to walk together in their University days at Oxford.

2

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,
Past the high wood, to where the elm-tree crowns
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames ?
The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames ?—
This winter-eve is warm,
Humid the air ! leafless, yet soft as spring,
The tender purple spray on copse and briers !
And that sweet city with her dreaming spires,
She needs not June for beauty's heightening.

Crowns—tops. **Flames**—bursts out into brilliant colouring. **Signal**—serving as a signal to pedestrians. **Weirs**—dams. **Humid**—soft. **Spray**—twig. **Briers**—prickly bushes especially of the wild rose. **Dreaming spires**—towers of Oxford University and constituent colleges steeped in moonlit night.

Gist. In the darkness of the evening the poet fails to trace the foot track leading from Childsworth Farm to the hill-top crowned with a lonely elm-tree which commands a view of the Ilsley Downs, the Valley, the three dams and the narrow Thames. Oxford with her towers has fallen as it were into a reverie and seems to be lying asleep in a moonlit night.

3

Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night !—
  Only, methinks, some loss of habit's power
    Befalls me wandering through this upland dim.
Once pass'd I blindfold here, at any hour ;
  Now seldom come I, since I came with him.
    That single elm-tree bright
Against the west—I miss it ! is it gone ?
  We prized it dearly ; while it stood, we said,
    Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not dead ;
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.

Habit's power—habitual power to recognise things. **Blindfold**—with eyes bandaged (as the place was very well-known to him). **Gipsy-Scholar**—Oxford scholar who joined a band of gipsies (a nomadic race) to learn the secrets of their lore.

Gist. Tonight Oxford looks as lovely as ever. Only the poet has lost his former power to recognise things around Oxford, with which he was so familiar. Formerly he could pass through the place with his eyes shut. He seldom comes here. He seems to miss the elm-tree. As long as it stood he and Clough believed the Gipsy-Scholar could not die.

4

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here,
But once I knew each field, each flower, each stick ;
And with the country-folk acquaintance made
By barn in threshing time, by new-built rick.
Here, too, our shepherd pipes we first assay'd.
Ah me ! this many a year
My pipe is lost, my shepherd's holiday !
Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart
Into the world and wave of men depart ;
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

Stick—twig or shoot of tree. **Barn**—granary for storing grain. **Rick**—haystack. **Assay'd**—attempted. **My shepherd's holiday**—cessation of poetry. **Needs**—necessarily.

Gist. The poet's visits to his once familiar Oxford countryside have now grown rare after his friend's death. His poetical inspiration or impulse to write poetry has since flagged. Heavy with grief for the death of his friend, he has to mix with the busy crowd of men. Clough left Oxford in disgust and ultimately left the world.

5

It irk'd him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates ; but yet he could not keep,
For that a shadow lour'd on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd his head.
He went ; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground ;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

Irk'd—disgusted or bored. **Mates**—college students. **Keep**—remain or stay. **Lour'd**—frowned ; looked dark and threatening. **The fields**—the university. **Silly**—simple ; innocent : (here, ignorant students of the University). **Droop**—languish. **Went**—resigned. **Piping**—poetry.

Gist. Clough loved Oxford—its students, the countryside and the innocent pleasures of the rustic folk. But when a bitter religious controversy raged over the place, his mind was clouded by doubts and misgivings.
So he left Oxford in disgust and ultimately died.

6

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
Before the roses and the longest day—
When garden-walks and all the grassy floor
With blossoms red and white of fallen May
And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I !

Tempestuous morn—stormy morning. **Primal burst of bloom**—first season of flowers. **Longest day**—21st June. **Fallen May**—departed month of May. **Strewn**—scattered. **Parting cry**—farewell note. **Vext**—put into a state of commotion by storm. **Volleying**—discharging.

Gist. Just as the cuckoo leaves England with the passing of spring, so has Clough left the world, amidst pattering rain-fall and with the wind blowing hard.

7

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go?
Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

Despairer—refers to the cuckoo losing hope all too soon. **Musk carnations**—flowers with musky smell. **Snapdragon**—kinds of plants with bag-shaped flower that can be made to gape. **Sweet-William**—a garden plant, kind of pink with close-clustered flowers. **Stocks**—a garden plant with fragrant flowers. **Alleys**—garden-paths. **Muffled**—covered. **Lattices**—structures of cross laths with interstices serving as fencing, doors etc.

Gist. It is a pity that the cuckoo passes away all too soon before Nature decks herself with flowers of mid-summer and other beauties.

8

He hearkens not ! light comer, he is flown !
  What matters it ? next year he will return,
    And we shall have him in the sweet spring-days,
With whitening hedges, und uncrumpling fern,
  And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,
    And scent of hay new-mown.
But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see ;
  See him come back, and cut a smoother reed,
    And blow a strain the world at last shall heed—
For Time, not Corydon, hath conquer'd thee !

Hearkens—listens to the call of the poet. **Ligh comer**—light-hearted sojourner or visitor. **Whitening**—putting forth white blossoms. **Uncrumpling fern**—mature ferns uncrumpled. **Swains**—shepherds or unfolded leaves. **Blow a strain**—sing a song. **Time**—death. **Corydon**—Corydon defeats Thyrsis in a poetic contest.

Gist. The light-hearted visitor (cuckoo) turns a deaf ear to the poet's appeal. The bird will again return with the advent of the spring season. But Thyrsis (Clough) will not come back, for Death has cut short his career on earth.

9

Alack, for Corydon no rival now !—
But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,
Some good survivor with his flute would go,
Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate ;
And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow,
And relax Pluto's brow,
And make leap up with joy the beauteous head
Of Proserpine among whose crowned hair
Are flowers first open'd on Sicilian air,
And flute his friend, like Orphens, from the dead.

Alack—alas. **Sicilian shepherds**—pastoral poets of Sicily. **Mate**—fellow poet. **Good survivor**—friend with a gift of poetry. **Ditty**—song. **Bion's fate—the** death of Bion (Sicilian poet) by poisoning. **The unpermitted ferry's flow**—no living soul is permitted to cross Styx, the river of Hell. **Pluto's brow**—soften the frown of Pluto. **Beauteous head**—covered with flowers. **Crowned hair**—wearing the crown of a queen.

Gist. The poet has lost his friend and poetic rival. When the pastoral poets of Sicily lost a companion, perhaps some kindly survivor who had the gift of poetry, would lament over his death and go to the underworld to appeal to Pluto and his Queen to bring him back to life, just as Orphens tried to bring back to life his wife, Euridyce.

10

O easy access to hearer's grace
When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine !
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,
She knew the Dorian waters gush divine,
She knew each lily white which Enna yields,
Each rose with blushing face ;
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard !
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirr'd ;
And we should tease her with our plaint in vain !

Access—approach ; here, touch the heart of man. **Dorian shepherds**—Sicilian pastoral poets. **She...... fields**—she was a native of Enna Sicilian. **Dorian...... divine**—the divine music of Dorian poetry. **Enna—a** valley in Sicily from which she was abducted by Pluto. **Pipe**—poetry. **Strain**—music. **Poor Thames**—not so musical like Dorian waters. **Plaint**—lamen.

Gist. Well Bought the pastoral poets of Sicily succeed in their attempt to bring their friend (Bion) back to life by appealing in the hearts of Pluto and Proserpine because the latter was a native of Sicily. But an English poet might not succeed in it because English poetry and English country are unfamiliar to Proserpine.

11

Well ! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,
Yet, Thyrsis, let me gave my grief its hour
In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd hill !
Who, if not I, for questing here hath power ?
I knew the wood which hides the daffodil,
I knew the Fyfield tree,
I know what white, what purple fritillaries
The grassy harvest of the river-fields,
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields,
And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries.

Wind-dispersed—scattered by wind, thereby failing to reach Proserpine's ears. **Its hour**—free expression. **Haunt**—Oxford and the country round. **Questing**—knock about searching. **Fyfield**—a village seven miles from Oxford. **Fritillaries**—kinds of little plants, especially, snake's-head. **Ensham**—a small town on the Thames, above Oxford. **Sandford**—a village on the Thames five miles below Oxford.

Gist. Although he knows full well that all his pathetic appeal to Proserpine will fall on deaf ears, still the poet would give free expression to his grief. He feels that he is best fitted for the task. He is thoroughly acquainted with the local where Thyrsis lived and worked.

12

I know these slopes ; who knows them if not I ?
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,
With thorns once studded, old, white-blossom'd trees,
Where thick the cowslips grew, and far descried
High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,
Hath since our day put by
The coronals of that forgotten time ;
Down each green bank hath gone the ploughboy's team,
And only in the hidden brookside gleam
Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Dingle—deep valley shaded with trees. **Studded**—adorned with. **Descried**—caught sight of from a distance. **Orchises**—orchids or members of a large family of herbs or exotics provided with spikes of usually red or purple flowers. **Put by**—laid aside. **Coronals**—garlands. **Gleam**—shine. **Orphans**—late bloomers or remnants. **Prime**—spring.

Gist. I know the hill-slopes shaded with trees better than any body else. But many a familiar valley in these parts has since been denuded of wreaths of flowers. All these are fogotten now. Each green plot of ground alongside the Thames has now been brought under cultivation. The primrose, alone remains in the hidden sides of the brook.

13

Where is the girl, who by the boatman's door,
Above the locks, above the boating throng,
Unmoor'd our skiff when through the **Wytham flats,**
Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among
And darting swallows and light water-gnats,
We track'd the shy Thames shore ?
Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,
Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass ?—
They all are gone, and thou art gone as well !

Lock—enclosed section of canal at a point when the level changes for raising and lowering boats by sluiced gates. **Boating throng**—collection of boats or crowd of people out on a boating excursion. **Unmoor'd**—unfastened. **Skiff**—light boat. **Wytham**—small village on the Thames above Oxford. **Flats**—low lands or swamps. **Loosestrife**—herbaceous plant golden or yellow in colour. **Blond**—of fair complexion. **Meadow-sweet**—plant common in most meadows. **Darting**—flying away rapidly.

Gist. The poet recalls the day when he and his friend were out on a boat trip on the Thames. On that day the boatman's daughter had unloosened the boat for them from its moorings. When the boat was towed along the bank of the Thames, the mowers in the field stopped their work to see them pass. Like Thyrs's, they were all dead and gone.

14

Yes, thou art gone ! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey ;
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train ;—
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring again.

Night—darkness of night. **Weaves her shade**—thickens. **Veil**—shade. **Chilling**—paralysing or deadening. **Sprent**—streaked. **Headlong train**—impetuous rush of life in young persons. **Bounding**—leaping ; here, responding.

Gist. Thyrsis is dead and gone. The poet feels the approach of death ; as the darkness of night closes upon the scenes before which he is standing. The vital flow of life is about to be stopped as the cold finger of death is closing in upon him. All his vital energies have been damped and the heart scarcely responds to new emotions.

15

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth ;
And high the mountain-tops ; in cloudy air,
The mountain-tops where is the throne of Truth,
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare !
Unbreachable the fort
Of the long-batter'd world uplifts its wall ;
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,
And near the real the charm of thy repose,
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

The way—*i.e.*, the path of truth. *Cf.* "Path of advance."—*Rugby Chapel*. **Practised**—experienced. **Sanguine**—hopeful. **Cloudy air**—lost in the region of doubt and uncertainty. **Life's morning-sun**—youth. **Unbreachable**—impregnable. **Long batter'd**—attacked and bombarded for a long time. **Turmoil**—the din and bustle of life. **Night**—death.

Gist. The path of Truth which seemed so short in his hopeful youth, now appears long and tedious to the poet. In his youth when his mind was not assailed by doubt and scepticism, Truth appeared to him to be enthroned on the top of a hill. But now the top appears to him to be dusky and dark and he has lost all hope of attaining Truth. The prison of the world is encircling him. He would fain seek rest in death.

16

But hush! the upland hath a sudden loss
Of quiet!—Look, adown the dusk hill-side,
A troop of Oxford hunters going home,
As in old days, jovial and talking, ride!
From haunting with the Berkshire hounds they come.
Quick! let me fly, and cross
Into yon farther field!—'Tis done; and see,
Back'd by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening-sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, Tree! the Tree!

Hush—let me stop my musing. **Adown**—down. **Dusk**—darkening. **Berkshire**—country to the west of Oxford. **Yon**—yonder. **Glorify**—lends a soft charm to. **Bare**—denuded of trees. **The tree**—the elm-tree.

Gist. The silence of the countryside is suddenly broken by a group of Oxford hunters who are now returning from the sport of the day with Berkshire hounds. The poet quickly withdraws from the place to avoid them and moves to a lonely place from which he can have a view of the much-looked-for elm-tree.

17

I take the omen ! Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,
The west unflushes, the high stars grow bright,
And in the scatter'd farms the lights come out.
I cannot reach the signal-tree to-night,
Yet, happy omen, hail !
Hear it from the broad lucent Arno-vale
(For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
The morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale.)

Omen—good sign, prophetic of good. **Veil**—the darkness of evening. **Unflushes**—western sky is losing its orange glow. **Lucent**—shining. **Arno-vale**—valley of the Arno in Italy. **Earth-forgetting**—in total oblivion of the world. **Oleander Gist**—an evergreen shrub with leathery leaves.

Gist. I take the tree to be a happy sign, as the symbol of the immortality of the Scholar Gipsy still going about in quest of Truth. The darkness of the evening is deepening, Although I cannot get at the tree in the darkness I welcome it all the same. O Clough, do listen to my discovery of the tree. But I forget you are buried in the valley of the Arno where you r: sleeping the eternal sleep of death, forgetful of the world.

18

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our tree is there !—
Ah, vain ! These English fields, this upland dim,
These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
That lone, sky-pointing tree, are not for him ;
To a boon southern country he is fled,
And now in happier air,
Wandering with the great Mother's train divine
(And purer or more subtle soul than thee,
I trow, the mighty mother doth not see)
Within a folding of the Apennine.

Bramble—rough prickly shrub, growing wild. **Engarlanded**—enveloped in mist. **Sky-pointing tree**—elm shooting up to a good height. **Happier air**—warmer and more agreeable climate of Italy. **Boon**—happy. **Great mother**—Rhea, ancient Greek goddess of the earth, identified with Nature—Goddess (Demeter). **Train divine**—attendants and followers. **Subtle**—refined. **Trow**—believe. **Folding**—valley or nook. **The Appennine**—chief mountain range in Italy.

Gist. All my shouts to Clough about my discovery of the elm-tree will be useless. The beauties of the English countryside, are lost on him. He is now gone to the warmer climate of the south in company with the divine retinue of Mother Nature in some valley of the Apennines, where he listens to the immortal songs, of old, as nothing of this world can ever reach his ears.

19

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old !—
  Putting his sickle to the perilous grain
    In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,
For thee the Lityerses-song again
  Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing ;
    Sings his Sicilian fold,
His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes—
  And how a call celestial round him rang,
    An heavenward from the fountain-brink he sprang,
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

Chants of old—songs of ancient pastoral poetry, **Perilous grain**—the condition attached to the reaping contest being that the competitor would be killed if defeated in reaping. **His Sicilian fold**—about his sheep-fold in Sicily. **Call celestial**—call of his father, Mercury, the messenger of the gods. **Marvel......skies**—the wonderful beauties of the starry heavens.

Gist. In the abode of the gods Clough would be listening to the Lityerses-song (a plaintive and popular song sung by corn-reaper) sung by Daphnis, (the legendary Sicilian shepherd) while cutting down the perilous grain in the hot fields of the King of Phrygia.

20

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here
  Sole in these fields ! yet will I not despair.
    Despair I will not, while I yet descry
'Neath the mild canopy of English air
  That lonely tree against the western sky.
    Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee !
  Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,
    Woods with anemonies in flower till May,
Know him a wanderer still ; then why not me ?

There—in heaven. **Sole**—alone. **Neath**—beneath **Canopy**—overhanging sky. **Still**—even now. **Against ......sky**—against the background of the western sky where the sun has set (see Verse 16). **Haunts**—frequents. **Soft sheep**—sheep with abundant wool. **Cages**—for holding hay.

Gist. The poet is now left all alone in the Oxford country. But he will not give himself up to despair so long as the elm tree stands for the tree symbolises that the search for Truth is eternal and that the Gipsy-Scholar still walks the places in his untiring efforts to get at the Truth. Why will they not allow the poet to continue as a humble seeker of Truth in Nature ?

21

A furgitive and gracious light he seeks,
Shy to illumine ; and I seek it too.
This does not come with houses or with gold,
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew ;
Tis not in the world's market bought and sold—
But the smooth sleeping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired ;
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,
He wends unfollow'd he must house alone,
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.

Fugitive—flitting. **Gracious**—benign. **Light**—the light of Truth. **He**—the Scholar-Gipsy. **Shy**—dimly. **Illumine**—shine. **Gold**—wealth. **Place**—high rank and social status. **Flattering crew**—host of admirers and flatterers. **Smooth-slipping**—passing away imperceptively. **Wends**—goes. **Unfollow'd**—alone. **House**—dwell. **Fares**—moves.

Gist. The Scholar-Gipsy sought Truth and so does the poet. The light of Truth waits and waits for moments of inspiration to illumine the mind of man. Truth is not to be attained in riches or rank or honour. The Scholar-Gipsy left the world and continues his search for Truth even now.

22

Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound ;
Thou wanderedst with me for a little hour !
Men gave thee nothing ; but this happy quest,
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,
If men procured thee trouble, gave the rest.
And this rude Cumner ground,
Its fir-topped Hust, its farms, its quiet fields,
Here cam'st thou in thy jocund youthful time,
Here was thine height of strength, thy golden prime !
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields.

Like **quest**—similar search for Truth. **Feeble**—weak and hesitant. **Rest**—peace. **Hurst**—a hill south-west of Oxford. **Jocund**—cheerful. **Prime**—youth. **Virtue**—strength.

Gist. O Clough, years was a continued search for Truth along with me, though for only a short time. You had no reward (material or otherwise) from the society of men but when they regarded you as a sceptic, the inner struggle within you was a source of strength and peace in times of your difficulties and uncertainties. Nature also gave you strength. Even now this beloved place of his is a source of strength to me.

23

What though the music of thy rustic flute
Kept not for long its happy, country tone ;
Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,
which task'd thy pipe too sore, and tired thy throat—
It fail'd, and thou was mute !
Yet hadst thou alway visions of our light,
And long with men of care thou couldst not stay,
And soon thy foot resumed its wandering way,
Left human haunt, and on alone till night.

What though—it does not matter though. **Rustic Flute**—shepherd's pipe *i. e.*, poetry. **A stormy note**—reflecting the intellectual and spiritual unrest of the age, **Contention-tost**—agitated by internal conflict. **Tired thy throat**—put a strain on your poetic powers. **Human haunt**—societ of man. **Night**—death.

Gist. The early poetry of Clough lost its former freshness and pastoral simplicity. Soon he was involved in the religious storm that began to rage in Oxford, with the result that his poetry became pessimistic in tone. None the less he began to pursue his vision of Truth during his wanderings after leaving Oxford till his death.

24

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here !—
'Mid city-noise, not, as with thee of yore,
Thyrsis ! in reach of sheep-bells, is my home.
Then through the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar,
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
To chase fatigue and fear :
Why faintest thou ? I wander'd till I died.
Roam on ! The light we sought is shining still.
Dost thou ask proof ? Our tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the lovel hill-side.

'Mid city-noise—amidst the noise and bustle of cities where the poet now lived. **Of yore**—in the days gone by. **In reach of sheep-bells**—the sweet tinkling of bells hung round the necks of sheep. *Cf.* Gray's "*Elegy*"—

"And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

The light we sought —the light of true life.

Gist. Although the poet now lives amidst the noise and bustle of town and in the busy society of men, the voice of his dead friend, Clough, is still inspiring him in the quest of Truth till the last day of his life.

NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS

(A) NOTES

Verse 1.

Thyrsis—Name of a shepherd mentioned in the *Idylls* of the Greek poet Theocritus and the *Eclogues* of the Roman poet Virgil. It is a literary convention to use the name of a shepherd in a pastoral elegy. When Milton wrote his elegy (*Lycidas*) on the death of Edward King, he cast it in pastoral form ; and when Shelley wrote his *Adonais* on the death of John Keats, the poet, he followed Milton's example. Theocritus was the principal Greek representative of pastoral poetry, the essence of which is simplicity of thought and action in a rustic setting. Arnold also followed Milton's example when he wrote this monody (a poem in which the mourner bewails someone's death) to commemorate his friend. Arthur Hugh Clough. Note that the author himself assumes the name of another shepherd, Corydon.

Here—Oxford countryside.

Makes or fills—Adapts to his use or inhabits by building houses. The motif or dominant idea of the poem is "struck at once by the reference to the restless movement of man-made things as compared to the peace and permanence of the fields or things."

Two Hinkseys—There are two villages about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north and south of Oxford. They are named North Hinksey and South Hinksey.

Nothing keeps the same—Continues in the same condition *i. e.*, everything has been changed.

Haunted Mansion—The large ale-house once frequented by villagers. Arnold uses the word *haunted* in this sense and not in the sense of being visited by ghosts. The next line brings this out.

Lacks—is wanting or without.

Sign—Sign-loard of the ale-house—("Cross Keys Inn" in South Hinksey).

Sibylla's name - Sybilla Curr was the name of the hostess. Evidently her name has been removed from the sign-board of the ale-house, because she has been dead all these years since Arnold's University days. This ale-house used to be an important land-mark but now it is no longer used as an inn.

Twisted chimney-stacks—Spiral pipes for letting out smoke from the fire places inside the rooms and rising above the roofs of houses. Time has destroyed them. Evidently they have been blown down by gusts of strong wind.

Are .... hills ?—A contrast is intended between the transitoriness of man-made houses and the restless activity of man and the permanance of Nature. Notice that this is the main motif or dominant idea of the poem.

See..... strays !—The poet was no stranger in these parts when he and Clough were students at Oxford.

Paraphrase : While visiting the Oxford country after the death of his friend, Clough, the poet is atonce struck by the sad changes that have come over the places turned to man's use by building houses. All the man-made landmarks in the two villages (South and North Hinksey) have undergone a great change : The ale-house once frequented by people has disappeared from the street of South Hinksey. The name of the hostress (Sybilla Curr) of Cross Keys Inn has now been removed ; even the spiral pipes for the outlet of s moke rising above house-tops are gone. Only the hills are unchanged. His was not the foot of a stranger walking in these parts roundabout Oxford. It was here that he and his friend, Clough, used to walk about in their University days.

Verse 2.

Runs it not here—Evidently the poet has failed to see the track ; hence this question.

Childsworth Farm—The path leading up to the hill from South Hinksey. Half-way up to the hill lies the Childsworth

or Chilswell Farm. It is at the bottom of the large field which is now used as golf ground."

The elm-tree...flame—"Matthew Arnold's tree, 'the lone sky-pointing elm of *Thyrsis* fell in one of the great gales of December, 1929. It is not quite certain where it stood, The late A. D. Godley wrote a paper in which he traced very conclusively the course which Arnold must have taken on the footpath from Childworth Farm to the neighbourhood of Cumner Hurst and came to the decision that the elm-tree must have been on the top of the Hurst. I believe it myself to have been one which was reached a little farther along the same line. It was a noble tree which stood "bare on its lonely ridge" in the great field lower than the Hurst but within the same double prospect of the Berkshire Downs and the Upper Thames Valley. And it was solitary, whereas the tree on the Hurst was close to the ring of firs which gives its main character to the eminence."—(Sir Edmund Chambers).

Behind whose... flames—The setting sun covers the hill with liquid gold.

Signal-elm—This tree served as a signal to the walkers and a symbol of the immortality of the Scholar-Gipsy (See Verse 3) to the poet and his friend.

Ilsley Downs—A range of hillocks to the south of Oxford about 16 miles from the town.

The three lone weirs—These are the three dams on the Thames called the Ark, Hart's and Langley's, above Bablock Hythe, a ferry over the Thames, five or six miles from Oxford.

Youthful Thames—The river is narrower than it is below Oxford where it becomes broader.

Sweet city with her deaming spires—Lovely city of Oxford with her towers, steeped in moonlit and slumbering while dreaming dreams of beautiful things.

Needs......heightening—Lovely Oxford does not need the golden touch of the spring season to adorn and enhance her beauty.

Pharaphrase : Does not the path run somewhere here leading from Childsworth Farm straight to the hill crowned with a lonely elm-tree, behind which the sun sets in a ruddy glow ? The elm on the top of the hill commands a view of the Ilsley Downs, the Upper Thames Valley, the three dams on the river and the river itself. The winter evening is warm and the air is moist and delightfully cool. The twigs and prickly brushes, though yet leafless, are soft as in the spring season. And Oxford with her towers seems to be locked in sleep and looks very lovely indeed. She does not need the spring season to adorn and make her lovelier still.

Verse 3.

Habit's power—Habitual power of recognizing things.

That single elm-tree bright –See *ante*.

We prized......dead—The tree was symbolical of the search for truth according to Arnold and his friend, Clough. The believed that the Scholar-Gipsy was not dead. This is why the elm-tree was a favourite with both the poets.

Gipsy-Scholar—It refers to a poor Oxford scholar who tired of seeking promotion, left the academic world and joined the gipsies to learn their lore. He roamed the world in their company and ia still supposed to haunt the Oxford countryside. "With this the poet Matthew Arnold has woven in his poem, *The Scholar Gipsy*, a wonderful evocation of that landscape and reflections on the contrast between the concentration and faith of the Scholar-Gipsy and this strange disease of modern life". —(C.O.D.).

Pharaphrase : Oxford looks as lovely as ever tonight. As I wander through this half-lighted upland I only feel I have lost my habitual power of recognising things. Formerly I could pass through the place with the eyes shut because the place was so familiar to me. Last time I came here with Clough. Since then I have not come here. I miss the bright lonely elm-tree which both of us valued dearly because we took it as the symbol of

the immortality of the Scholar-Gipsy. As long as it stood, we believed, the Scholar-Gipsy was not dead.

Verse 4.

Threshing time—Time for beating out grain from corn.

Our shepherd...assay'd—Arnold and Clough tried their hands at the composition of pastoral poetry dealing with country life. Note that the essence of the pastoral is simplicity of thought centring round action in a rustic setting, *e. g.*, Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Jonson's *Sad Shepherd*, Milton's *Comus* etc.

My pipe is lost—I have lost the power of writing poetry.

My shepherd's holiday—On account of the loss of poetic inspiration the poet ceased to write poetry ever since his friend's death. Since then he has been enjoying holiday from work. Two volumes of his poetry were published in 1851 and 1853. In 1859 he was appointed a Foreign Assistant Commissioner on Education. During these years he was engaged in educational work. The *New Poems* were published in 1867.

Into the......went away—The poet was compelled by the circumstances of his life to abandon writing poetry. Still he has to mix with the busy crowd of men so as to be engaged in the affairs of the world. Here people are, as it were, tossed high on the crest of waves only to be hurled down the very next instant while engaged in the material concerns of daily life.

Paraphrase : My visits to the Oxford country have become rare since the death of my friend. While at Oxford, I was familiar with each field, flower and twig. In these familiar grounds roundabout Oxford I and my friend had occasion to try our hands at the composition of poetry. But since my friend's death I have lost my poetical power, as my poetical inspiration has flagged and I am compelled by sheer force of circumstances to abandon poetry which I regret very much. I have to mix with the busy crowd of common men and to be engaged in the

affairs of the world. But Clough left Oxford in disgust and out of his own choice and ultimately died.

Verse 5.

It irk'd.........here—Clough got fed up with his life at Oxford, as he had no peace of mind.

Shadow—Here the reference is to the *Oxford Movement* started by Keble in July 1833, and supported by Newman and others. It aimed at the revival of the Catholic faith and rituals and of a higher conception than was generally prevalent of the position and functions of the Church. "Clough became involved in this bitter religious controversy as a Fellow and Tutor of Balliol College." He felt that his position as a Fellow and Tutor gave him the appearance of believing many things, which he had not believed." As a Fellow and Tutor he had to profess his faith in the English Church in which he had already lost his faith. So he felt that he could not possibly continue as Tutor.

Fields—The University.

Shepherds—Professors.

Silly sheep—Simple ignorant students.

N.B. Note that the pastoral imagery is kept up by the use of these expressions.

Some life......unblest—Unhappy life because of the religious uncertainties of the day. The Oxford Movement cast a shadow of doubt and uncertainty over the whole atmosphere of the University.

Made him......head—Doubts and uncertainties in religious matters filled his mind with despair and he had no peace of mind.

Went—He resigned his position in 1848.

His piping......sound—His poetry struck a deep note of sadness. *Vide* his *Amours de Voyage* and *Dipsychus*.

Of storms .....ground—The storm of religious controversy which raged over Oxford changed the academic atmosphere of the University which was formerly a serene seat of intellectual culture.

Could not wait their passing—Could not continue there

till the theological storm blew over, for he took refuge in death.

Paraphrase: Clough had no peace of mind at Oxford and so he felt unhappy there. Nonetheless he loved the simple joys of the rustic folk, his fellow-students and friends. But he could not continue here for a longer time as the theological storm created by the Oxford Movement cast a shadow of uncertainty and doubt over the whole academic atmosphere of the University, with the result that its *clientele*—the students and teachers—were all swept away by it. The mind of Clough too was clouded by these doubts and uncertainties. He still continued to write poems but his poetry lost its former freshness and took on a tinge of melancholy. At this stage he resigned his Tutorship at Oriel and left the University in sheer disgust. He did not survive long till the storm blew over.

Verse 6.

Some tempestuous........Fune—Just as the cuckoo leaves England when storms begin to blow, so did Clough leave the world when the theological storm was raging very high at Oxford.

Volleying rain—Rain pouring down in torrents.

The bloom.....I - This is the parting note of the cuckoo; "Now that the flower season is over, I must go." In his letter to his mother Arnold says, "The cuckoo on the June morning I heard in the garden at Woodford."

Paraphrase : Just as the cuckoo leaves the shores of England with the bursting of the first storm in early June before the first flowers of the year, before the rose bloom and the days become longer, and the walks inside the garden are scattered all over with the red and white flowers of the outgoing month of May—so did Clough leave the world. The farewell note of the cuckoo is to be heard at a time when the flower season is over, the rains come down in torrents and a strong breeze blows from the wet fields in and through storm-tossed garden trees.

Comment : Notice the aptness of what is called the "Homeric smile," after. Homer, the Greek epic poet, regarded by the ancients as the author of the *Iliad* and the

Odyssey which abound in many examples of such similes as in *Paradise Lost* of Milton. Such similes are peculiar to epic poetry. Note also that Arnold praised Clough in his lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford for "the Homeric simplicity of his literary life.' Perhaps he wished to praise Clough for his self-less devotion to literature, free from any professional motive.

Verse 7.

Too quick despairer—It is sad to think that the cuckoo should lose hope all too soon and leave England in despair. Likewise, Clough left the world in sheer disgust too quickly. If the bird had waited till mid-summer, it could have enjoyed the delights and beauties of another splendid display of flowers.

Wherefore—Why ?

High Midsummer pomps—Another splendid display of flowers and other beauties of the midsummer.

Soon shall......blow—These lines illustrate the poet's minute observation of nature and are admittedly one of the most beautiful Nature descriptions in English poetry.

With his homely cottage-smell—Smell peculiar to cottage gardens.

Dreaming—Quiet.

Evening star—Venus.

Paraphrase : O cuckoo, you depart all too soon after the first flower season. Why do you go so quickly ? Soon there will be another splendid display of flowers and other beauties of the midsummer—the carnations with their musky odour will open out their petals and grow in size—the snap-dragons with their golden pollen grain, Sweet-William with its plain and unpretending smell, stocks diffusing their fragrance, roses shining in the garden-paths and open latticed windows of cottages covered with jasmine flowers—will all come out in full bloom. There will be clusters of flowers under the quiet garden-trees. The full moon and the bright evening-star will also enhance the beauty of midsummer nights.

Verse 8.

Light comer—The cuckoo is so called because it is a light-hearted visitor, coming and going at his sweet will.

Uncrumpling fern—A mature fern. The leaves of young ferns look wrinkled while the mature ones unfold themselves.

We swains—Shepherds or fellow-poets. In this poem the poet speaks of himself as a shepherd of the name of Corydon according to pastoral conventions.

Cut......reed. Sing sweet and smooth songs. During the agitation over the Oxford Movement, Clough's poems struck a deep melancholy note reflecting the spiritual doubts of the period and the agony of his own soul.

Blow......heed. Strike such a note in his song that people would hear with delight and attention.

Corydon "A shepherd in Theocritus and in the Eclogues of Virgil, whose name has become conventional in pastoral poetry." (C.O.D.) In the seventh Eclogue, Virgil describes a poetic contest between Thyrsis and Corydon. In this contest the latter defeated the former. But in this particular case Thyrsis has been conquered not by Corydon but by death.

Paraphrase : The cuckoo does not respond to the call of the poet. It is a light-hearted sojourner who comes and goes at his sweet will ; so it is gone. Its presence or absence makes no difference to anybody. It will revisit England in the spring season next year when the ferns will put forth white blossoms. The ferns will mature, the blue-bells will toss their heads from the garden-paths and newly-cut hay will diffuse a peculiar smell all around. But Clough will no longer see his fellow poets, who will no more have the pleasure of seeing him come back and of piping a more melodious and polished note which the people of the world would hear with delight and attention. He has not been defeated by Corydon but by death.

Verse 9.

Sicilian shepherds—Pastoral poets of Sicily. Pastoral

poetry was in its origin distinctively Dorian and especially Sicilian.

Some......go—The reference is to Orpheus, the mythical singer of ancient Greece who went to Hades with his lyre to bring back his wife, Eurydice, who had died of snake-bite. His prayer, however, was only granted by Pluto, King of Hades, on condition that he should not look back upon his wife till they had arrived in the upper world But at the last moment his anxiety and love for his wife were too great for him He looked round to see that his wife was actually following him and he beheld her caught back into the infernal regions. (S.C.D.)

Bion's fate—The reference is to the pastoral poet of Smyrna (Sicily) who flourished about 100 B.C. He spent the last years of his life in Sicily where he was poisoned. The style of Bion is refined and his versification elegant. We still possess his epic poem, *The Dirge of Adonais*, which inspired Shelley's *Adonais*. He is generally coupled with Moschus, another pastoral poet, who was a pupil of Bion. His pathetic lament for the death of Bion is doubtfully attributed to him ("good survivor"). (C.O.D.)

The idea is that just as Orpheus charmed Pluto and Proserpine by his music and songs and they consented to restore his wife Eurydice to him on the fulfilment of one condition, so also Moschus's sad song (*Lament for Bion*) served a similar appeal to Pluto to restore the dead poet (Bion) to life.

The unpermitted.........flow—The ferryman, Charon, would agree to convey in his boat across the river Styx to Hades the souls of the dead and not living ones, who cannot be permitted to cross the river.

Relax......brow—The reference is to Pluto or Hades, the god of the nether world. He ruled over the souls of the dead. His character is described as fierce and inexorable.

Proserpine—The Queen of Hades. She was carried off by Plato to the nether world while gathering flowers at Etna or Enna in Sicily. She is represented as wearing flowers.

round about her head. *Cf.* the beautiful poem : "The Garden of Proserpine" by Swinburne.

First open'd......air—The flowers which adorn the head of Proserpine, Queen of Hades, first bloomed in the valley in Sicily wherefrom she was abducted by Pluto to the nether world.

And flute......dead—Bring back his friend from the region of dead souls by the power of his song and lyre.

Paraphrase : The poet is left without a poetic rival by the death of his friend. He is reminded of a parallel situation in the history of pastoral poetry. When Bion died, his pupil Moschus wrote an elegy on him. In this elegy Moschus expressed a desire to cross the river Styx (which no living soul is allowed to do) to soften the stern brow of Pluto and his wife Proserpine so that they might be charmed by his songs and agree to let his master Bion go back with him, like Orpheus.

Verse 10.

O easy......grace—Proserpine was easy of access to Moschus because she was a native of Enna in Sicily. He could easily touch her heart.

Dorian shepherds—Such as, Theocritus, Moschus and Bion, all of whom composed their pastoral poetry in the Dorica dialect. Dorians were one of the principal Hellenic races. Doria was noted for its rustic dialect.

Blushing face—Red colour of the rose.

Poor Thames—Not regarded as so musical like the Sicilian waters, which means that English poetry is not so rich and musical as Greek pastoral poetry.

Her..... foot stirr'd—Proserpine had never set her foot on the Cumner range of the countryside at Oxford, usually dotted in spring time with cowslips.

And we......in vain—English poetry would sound foreign and unfamiliar to Proserpine. So it is useless to annoy her with the prayer of restoring Thyrsis to life. The poet means to say that compared with the famous elegy of Moschus, his is a poor attempt and as such he has little hope to immortalise his friend, Clough.

Paraphrase : The Sicilian poet might very well succeed in his attempt to bring back Bion to life by melting the hearts of Pluto and Proserpine, for the latter hailed from Sicily before she left for the nether world. Proserpine was familiar with the divine streams flowing through Sicily, each little white lily growing in the Enna valley and each rose with a red hue were known to her. She loved Dorian poetry and music. But an English poet cannot expect to touch her heart by songs because neither the river Thames nor Cumner range of hills overgrown with cowslips was known to her So it is idle to expect her to be moved by English song or music.

Verse 11.

Tree-topp'd hill—The hill of the Cumner range crowned with the elm-tree.

Fyfield tree—This is the tree referred to in *Scholar-Gipsy*, line 83.—See also Verse 3.

Grassy harvest—The green grass of the fields.

Sedged brooks—Sedge is a kind of grasslike plant with jointless stones growing in marshes or by water side. Here the expression means rivers full of sedges.

Tributaries—Small rivers serving to swell a large river (Thames).

Paraphrase : All my words of appeal will be wasted on Proserpine or Pluto. Perhaps they will not reach Proserpine's ears. Yet, Thyrsis, I will give free expression to my grief for you knowing as I do our familiar places round about Oxford where you once lived. Let me find out the neighbouring hill crowned with "the lone sky-pointing elm." I feel I am best fitted for this work,—for searching out familiar landmarks, such as, the wood which hides the daffodils from view, the elm-tree of Fyfield under which village girls danced and sang on May-day, the white and purple tributaries growing on grassy meadows alongside the Thames, both above and below Oxford—above Ensham and below Sandford—and the rivulets, full of sedges, which are tributaries of the Thames.

Verse 12.

High tower'd...orchises—Picked orchids rising high in the sky could be seen from a distance.

Put by......time—They have laid aside garlands of flowers which they wore in our student days at Oxford. Few can recall those good old days.

Orphans......prime—The late survivors of remnants of the spring which is the flower season.

Pharaphrase : I yield to none in my thorough knowledge and familiarity with the hill-slopes of Oxford and the countryside. But much in the once familiar scenes has changed since I left Oxford. In my student days at Oxford many a valley on this loved hill-side used to be overgrown with prickly shrubs, bearing white flowers, cowslips and orchids provided with spikes, shooting up to a good height in the sky so as to be seen from a distance, has since laid aside these garlands of flowers which used to be seen formerly. Those student days at Oxford are almost forgotten now. Every green plot of land alongside the Thames has since been cultivated. Only the primroses hidden in the recesses of the riverside, shine out in lone splendour—the sole remnants of the flowery spring season.

Verse 13.

Locks—The reference is to the locks and to the dam at King's Weir, above the city of Oxford.

Water-gnats—Two-winged flies usually seen skimming along the water surface.

Shy Thames shore—Banks of the Thames which are hardly distinguishable from the surrounding swamps ; 'shy' because this part of the Thames is seldom visited.

Mowers—Grass-cutters.

Tiny swell—Small waves caused by the boat as it skimmed along.

Heaved—Rose with alternate falls as the boat caused a stir among the grasses, growing along the margin of the river.

Suspended scythe—The mowers in the nearby fields stopped their work to see the boatmen pass.

Paraphrase : I recall the eventful day when we were out on a boat trip over the Thames and the boatman's daughter, standing outside the door of her house above the locks and the crowd of boats down-stream, unfastened our light boat from its moorings. We then pulled our boat along the shore of the river through the swampy Wytham, dotted with many varieties of flowering plants. This part of the river was hardly distinguishable from the swampy lowlands and was seldom visited. As our boat skimmed along the surface of the river, the swallows and water-gnats flew away rapidly. The mowers stopped their work of reaping the grass which grew alongside the river when they noticed the heaving of the water surface.

Verse 14.

Night—Here it means the darkness of death. Notice that in Verse 2 the poet started describing scenes of the Oxford country in the evening. In this verse he feels that the darkness of the night is slowly closing in upon the scenes. The poet feels that he is aging fast and that, from the gathering darkness of the night, he is reminded of the state of his own life, wnich is slowly coming to an end.

Weaves her shade—Thickness and diffuses her darkness round.

I see......day—As the darkness of night is covering the country-side, and slowly creeping on the sky, he is reminded of the slow approach of death.

Veil—Shade.

Draw soft—slowly creep on the sky.

Her slowly chilling .. ..grey—The cold touch of death has deadened my faculties. I feel that the chilling breath of death is blowing about cheeks with the result that they have become thinner and my hair has turned grey.

I feel......train—Just as frost freezes the current of water in a pond, so also the chilly touch of death is

stopping the vital flow of life (is chilling the general current of soul).

Headlong train—The impetuous vigour of life in youth, *i.e.*, the former vigorous course of life.

The foot......dew—No longer can he get up early in the morning for a walk on the grass with the morning. dew. *Cf.* Gray's Elegy :

"Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Breathing with hasty steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn."

The heart......new—The heart scarcely responding to the call of new emotions.

Less......again—If my hopes are once frustrated it does not revive in the mind.

Paraphrase : Thyrsis, you have left us for ever. As the gathering darkness of night is slowly closing upon the scene I am reminded of the slow approach of Death. The deadening effect of advancing age is left by me round about my cheeks which are becoming thinner and my brown hair which is turning grey. The cold finger of Death has stopped the vital flow of life, impairing my energies so that my steps are becoming slower and slower in my effort to climb the upland lawn early in the morning and walk over the dewy fields and my heart responding not so quickly as before to new emotions. Hope spring eternal in the human mind but due to advancing age once it is frustrated, it does not tend to revive on his mind. Advancing age has frozen his body and soul.

Verse 15.

Tops......bare—As in the morning sun the mountain-tops look bright and clear and the journey uphill seems easy, so also in his youth, when he was full of hopes, the heights of Truth on the mountain-top appeared clear and unclouded with doubts, uncertainties and disbeliefs.

Unbreachable....walls—As a strong fort remains impregnable in the face of repeated bombardments by the enemy's forces, so also we strike at the secure walls of the fort in vain in our attempt to get to the citadel of Truth

the customs, manners and all our much-vaunted activities acting as a barrier to our goal.

Near......repose—The blessing of rest from this purposeless striving and restless activity of life is the only reality in a world full of din and bustle. This is the rest which Clough is enjoying at the moment.

Night .... fall—Death would be as welcome as the visit of a friend after a long separation.

Paraphrase : Contrasting his present state at his mature age with that in his early youth the poet says that the way to Truth which seemed so short and easily accessible in this inexperienced and sanguine youth, now appears to be too long and tedious. And the uphill journey to the heights of Truth, which seemed so smooth-sailing in the dawn of life, now appears to be lost in mists and cloud, *i.e.*, doubt and disbelief. The poet feels himself encircled by an impregnable well which is too strong for him and he is as far of from the citadel of Truth as ever. All his much-vaunted activities are now profitless. He longs for the happiness of perpetual rest which his friend, Clough, is now enjoying. He would, therefore, welcome, death when it comes, like a dear friend who visits his friend after a long separation.

Verse 16.

Dusk hill-side—Shadowy hill-side with the darkness of the evening closing round.

Berkshire hounds—The hounds of Berkshire breed.

Back'd ......sunset—Against the dark background of the western sky after sunset.

The orange .... sky—The last rays of the setting sun produce a lovely colour-effect. The evening sky is turned into orange and then violet.

Paraphrase : Let me stop my musings, for the silence of the place is suddenly broken by the party of Oxford hunters who are on their way home merrily talking among themselves as in my own days at Oxford, as they are coming down the dusky hill-side. Let me quickly move away from this place to the yonder meadow. What a

contrast to the lovely scene created by the last rays of the setting sun turning the evening-sky into alternate colours of orange and violet !

Verse 17.

I take the omen—I fully understand the significance of the tree which used to be regarded by me and Clough as the symbol of the immortality of the Gipsy-Scholar and his high ideals in quest of the Truth. The tree now stands for the immortality of his friend and his ideal, *viz.*, pursuit of Truth to which he would dedicate himself. Moreover the accidental discovery of the tree directly as he shifted to the yonder meadow in order to avoid the noisy sportsmen, is an earnest of the success of his life's mission.

Happy..... hail –Even though he is not successful in reaching the symbolic elm-tree tonight in the darkness, nevertheless he welcomes it, as it is the symbol of an ideal.

Arno-vale—The poet Clough died at Florence which is on the valley of the river Arno, one of the largest rivers of Italy.

Hear .....vale—The poet shouts the welcome news of the discovery of the elm-tree to his friend in heaven.

For there......pale—Clough is sleeping the eternal sleep of death from which there is no awakening in total oblivion of the world. There are bushes of Oleanders with red and white flowers over his grave.

Paraphrase : I fully realise the significance of the symbolic elm-tree. The very fact that the tree is alive is proof positive of the immortality of the Scholar-Gipsy and of his ideal pursuit of Truth on which he is still busy. The darkness of the evening settles over the place. The western sky is fast losing its orange glow. A white fog is spreading over the bushes. The stars are high up in the sky while lamps are being lit in houses. Though I cannot reach the elm-tree tonight on account of darkness, I welcome the discovery that it is there, which is a hopeful sign. I would like Clough to hear it but I tend to forget that he is sleeping the eternal sleep of death in Arno-valley, forgetful of the world.

Verse 18.

Hear......there !—Over-joyed at the discovery of the elm-tree, the poet gives a shout to his friend, Clough.

Ah, vain !—Presently he is reminded that his friend is dead and gone.

Sky-pointing tree—Being symbolical of truth the elm-tree stands erect and points towards the sky. Truth is lofty.

Great Mother—Notice that Thyrsis becomes a vital part of Nature like Adonais in Shelley. That is why the poet identifies the ancient Greek goddess of the earth with Nature-goddess. *Cf.*

> "He is a portion of the loveliness
> Which once he made more lovely."
> —Shelley's *Adonais*, Verse XLIII (*ll.* 379-80)

Here the loss of personal life (Adonais or Keats) is amply compensated by its identification with the Eternal life, which sustains the world. This is Shelleyan pantheism according to which the whole universe is the expression of the Eternal life.

And purer.....thee—A purer and more devoted soul than Clough had not attended on the Nature-Goddess in whose company Clough wandered in the valley of the Apennine mountains accompanied by her divine retinue, while listening to the immortal songs of old pastoral poetry.

Paraphrase : It is useless for me to shout out to Clough about my discovery of the symbolic elm-tree, for my friend is dead. All the happy features of the landscape —the gathering darkness of the night settling over the hill-side, the pale prickly shrubs growing wild, now being slowly enveloped in mist and the lonely tree pointing out to the sky—are not for him. He has left us for a warmer climate in the southern country where he is wandering in the happy company of Mother Nature accompanied by her divine retinue, listening the immortal songs of old. It is hard to conceive of a purer and more devoted soul than that of Clough among those attending on the goddess.

Verse 19.

Putting etc.—There are two separate legends connected with this and Arnold here seems to have combined the two into one. In this connection Arnold's own note on the two versions of the Daphnis-legend may be quoted.

Daphnis, the ideal Sicilian shepherd of Greek pastoral poetry, was said to have followed into Phrygia, his mistress, Piplea, who had been carried off by robbers, and to have found her in the power of the King of Phrygia, Lityerses, Lityerses used to make strangers try a contest with him in reaping corn and to put them to death if he overcame them. Hercules arrived in time to save Daphnis, took upon him the reaping contest with Lityerses, overcame him and slew him. The Lityerses-song connected with this tradition was one of the early plaintive strains of Greek popular poetry and used to be sung by corn-reapers.

Other traditions represented Daphnis as beloved by a nymph who extored from him an oath to love no one else. Subsequently, however, he fell in love with a princess and was struck blind by the jealous nymph. Mercury who was his father raised him to heaven and made a fountain spring up in the place from which he ascended. At this fountain the Sicilians offered yearly sacrifices.

Hapless love—Love for the nymph which ultimately blinded him because he fell in love with the princess. At this, his father translated him to heaven.

Paraphrase : Clough will be entertained in the abode of the Gods by the Lityerses-song, sung by the shepherd-poet Daphnis in a plaintive tone like the one he sang while reaping corn in the hot fields of the king of Phrygia. Daphnis will also be singing to Clough songs about his sheep-fold in Sicily, his flock, his hapless love-affair with the nymph which subsequently cost him his eyes, his rescue by his father, Mercury, subsequent translation to Heaven and the beauties of the starry heavens.

Verse 20.

While......sky—Though his friend is dead and gone, there is yet hope in that the tree which is symbolical of

the search for Truth for which the Gipsy-Scholar still lives on, still stands.

Outliving thee—Though you are dead and gone, the Scholar-Gipsy continues to live on.

Then why not me ?—Why should not the fields, which see the Gipsy-Scholar wandering about even now in his favourite haunts, also allow him to wander about there ? This means that the poet will continue to seek Truth in Nature, inspired by the noble example of the Scholar-Gipsy.

Paraphrase : You have left us for the southern region and I am alone in these fields. Yet I will not lose hope as long as I see the lonely elm-tree standing against the dark background of the west after sunset beneath the gentle English sky. The continued presence of the tree tells me that the Scholar-Gipsy is still wandering about the woods, though you are no longer on the land of the living. He is an untiring seeker after Truth for which he is still wandering in the fields where sheep loaded with abundant wool on their bodies eat their hay from cages and in the forests where anemones are in full bloom till the end of May. Why will these fields grudge my presence as a wanderer on a similar quest for Truth.

Verse 21.

A fugitive and gracious light—The light of Truth reveals itself to its votary or devoted adherent at long last, though at first it tends to elude its grasp.

Sky to illumine—The light of Truth eludes our grasp, delays and waits for the flash of inspiration from heaven to light up the mind of man.

'T is......sold—Truth is not like a saleable commodity in the market which can be had in exchange for money.

Out of......gone—The seeker after Truth must shun society which tends to distract him and leads him astray in order to devote himself to its pursuit with a single-minded devotion.

By his...inspired—The seeker after Truth (the Scholar-Gipsy) pursues his quest goaded by an inner urge and inspiration from within.

Paraphrase : The Scholar-Gipsy seeks the light of Truth which at last confers its blessings on its devoted followers, though at first it ever eludes its seeker. The poet also claims to be a humble votary in the temple of Truth. The humble seeker after Truth is left waiting for long till at last a beneficent light from heaven suddenly illuminates his mind. Truth is not like an earthly commodity which can be bought in the market and exchanged for money. It does not lie in riches, rank or high social status. It has to be sought for unweariedly for a long time. The humble devotee must be ready to shun the society of man so that he may devote himself to its pursuit with a single-minded devotion. The Scholar-Gipsy was such a devout worshipper of Truth. Such is also the life for the poet who too is ready to pursue his quest urged on by an inner impulse.

Verse 22.

Thou......hour—Both the poet and his friend Clough were engaged in a similar search for Truth during their association at the University but this was all too brief, for Clough soon left Oxford in disgust.

Men......nothing—Clough had no reward (material or otherwise) from the society of men for his unwearied search after Truth. On the contrary, the theological storm which raged fiercely among them made him a pessimist and he left the University.

Esteem'd thee feeble—Regarded him as weak and hesitant and a sceptic.

Here jocund......time—Refers to the happy and cheerful days of his youth when the storm of religious doubts had not burst on him.

Here......prime—It was during his days in Cumner uplands with their nearby hill (Hurst), topped with firs, farms and peaceful fields that he reached the utmost limit of his power. This means that Clough's poems written during this period were his best according to Arnold.

And...yields—Even now the dear old place which used to be frequented by them, is a source of strength and power to me.

Paraphrase : O Clough, your life was a continued search for Truth. It was a joint quest during our association with each other at the University for a short time, for soon you left the University in sheer disgust. You got no comfort or material reward for your unwearied search after Truth from the society of men ; on the contrary, the religious storm that raged over the University, made you a pessimist and a sceptic. This search for Truth was a source of strength to you and gave you much-needed relief. It was when you lived in the Cumner uplands with its nearby hill (Hurst) over-topped with firs, farms and peaceful fields and in your youth when the religious storm had not burst, that you attained the highest development of your poetic power. Even now tnese much-frequented places are a source of strength and power to me.

Verse 23.

Thy rustic flute......tone—The earlier poety of Clough had a cheerful note or vein, which was sadly found wanting in his later poems because these later were composed at a time of great intellectual and spiritual unrest owing to the Oxford Movement. This accounts for the melancholy note of the latter from which the earlier poems (such as *Bothie*) were remarkably free.

A stormy note—Soon, his later poetry acquired a note of mental and spiritual unrest, *e.g.*, his *Dipsychus*.

Of men...groan—His later poetry after the inauguration of the Oxford Movement was, as it were, characteristic of men whose minds are dissociated and torn by an inner conflict and also are groaning and drifting in the storm of religious controversies.

Which...throat—All this put an undue and heavy train on his poetic powers in general and on the smooth flow of his poems till he stopped composing poems at all.

It fail'd...mute—The oaten pipe of the shephered was at last broken under the dead weight of mental and spiritual unrest till the poetic voice of Clough was silent.

Visions...light—Had a glimpse of Truth, for even after his poetic powers had ceased functioning, he continued to pursue Truth.

And soon......way—After leaving Oxford, Clough wandered abroad but never gave up his incessant quest for Truth.

Paraphrase : Freshness, simplicity and a cheerful note characterised his early poetry. But with the inauguration of the Oxford Movement, Clough's mind began to be assailed by doubts and torn by an inner conflict with the result that his later poetry acquired a pessimistic note. Soon, all this put so heavy a strain on the smooth flow of his poetry that it well-nigh exhausted his poetic impulse altogether. Nonetheless Clough did not lose the vision of Truth even when his poetic voice was silenced but he wandered about in quest of Truth and shunned the society of men till death came upon him.

Verse 24.

'Mid city...noise—The reference is to the fact that during all these years the poet was engaged in educational work for which he had to undertake journeys abroad. *Cf.* "the city's jar" in Arnold's poem, *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens.*

In reach...home—By the time the poet was engaged in educational work in cities he has abandoned poetry and turned to prose and critical literature. So, the sound of sheep's bells could no longer be heard by him.

Let . fear—The poet hopes that the voice of Clough will send out to him an occasional whisper in the midst of the distractions of cities, in the midst of his toil so as to drive away from his mind doubts, fatigue and fear.

Why faintest thou ?—Clough's words of cheer will ask him not to falter and faint in the poet's quest of Truth.

The light...still—Clough's unwearied quest of Truth was continued till the last day of his life.

Dost...hill—If proofs were needed the poet might look on the elm-tree which symbolises the eternal quest of Truth by the Scholar-Gipsy.

Paraphrase : The poet's visits to the Oxford country are becoming few and far between. He now lives far away amidst the din and bustle of towns engaged in other work. The pleasant tinkling of sheep-bells no longer reaches his ears. He hopes that the voice of Clough will often reach him in the midst of his toil so as to drive away fatigue and fear in order that he may not falter and faint in the quest of Truth. Let Clough whisper to the ears of the poet to the followi g effect : "Do not be downcast, my dear friend. I pursued Truth till the last day of my life. If you doubt this, by way of proof, let me point out to you the elm-tree which is symbolical of the eternal search for Truth. This shows that the Scholar-Gipsy is still wandering about the hill-side in his great quest of Truth.

(B) EXPLANATIONS

1. Ah me ! this many......away. (*Verse 4 : ll. 6-10*)

[The reference is to Arnold's election to the Oxford Chair of Poetry in 1857. He was only 45 when his last volume of poems appeared. The poet looked back to the "joy, the bloom, the power" which now disappeared for good, for after this volume he wrote no more poetry in the next twenty-one years. This was about the time when Arnold was engaged in educational work and had to undertake tours abroad in educational commissions.]

In these lines the poet deeply regrets that he has ceased to write poetry since the death of his friend, Clough. He looks back to his happy time as a poet when they tried their hands at poetry in these familiar grounds. He is compelled by the pressure of circumstances, arising out of his engagement in other works, to abandon poetry, for he has to mix with the busy crowd of men and be engaged in affairs of the world.

2. It irk'd......................dead. (*Verse 5 : ll. 1-10*)

[The reference is to the life of Clough at Oxford and the circumstances under which he was obliged to leave Oxford in sheer disgust. "Clough entered Balliol College, Oxford, in 1837, and was deeply influenced by the theological controversies of the time initiated by what is known

as the Oxford Movement. Clough was never able to accept his friend's unquestioning attitude in regard to this movement. So, with scrupulous conscientiousness that always marked him, he resigned a fine position as Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College on account of his religious difficulties and signalised this step not by any weighty manifestation of his feelings, but by a mirthful pastoral, poem, *The Bothie of Tober-na-Virolich* (1848), for he was at heart intensely relieved by this distinct severance with the implication of orthodoxy." (*A* Compton-Rickett : *A History of English Literature*, p. 464.]

Clough was soon beginning to feel unhappy. He had no peace of mind. But he loved the simple joys of the country-folk and partook in their innocent pleasures which Oxford could offer. Soon, however, the placid intellectual life of Oxford was rudely disturbed by the religious controversies which went by the name of the Oxford Movement and which cast a shadow of uncertainty and doubt over the academic atmosphere of the place and in particular over Clough who was swept away by the religious storm and turned a sceptic. He was seized with a great agony of mind. There was a tinge of melancholy in his poems which clearly reflected the spiritual doubt and unrest of the day. Soon, Clough left the University in disgust and died.

3. **But Thyrsis...............thee.** (*Verse 8 : ll. 7-10*)

[Here the reference is to pastoral poetry and its conventions. "Pastoral idylls are lyrics of no great length, and represent herdsmen or shepherds singing in contests for such prizes such as a fat lamb or a carved drinking bowl, or pouring forth lays of love or laments for a dead friend or a faithless maiden or gossiping over some country affair."—(A. R Weekes : *Shelley's Adonais*, p. :0].

In these lines the poet says that although the cuckoo will revisit England with the coming of spring next year, Clough, who left the world soon after the theological controversy ceased to blow over, will not come back to sing his sweet pastoral songs with a more melodious and

smoother note than his latest Oxford poems, which were characterised by a note of melancholy.

Virgil in his "*The Eclogue*" describes a poetic contest between Thyrsis and Corydon. While at Oxford, Arnold had occasion to defeat Thyrsis but it now appears that in this particular case Thyrsis has been defeated not by Corydon (Arnold) but by death.

4. Alack, for Corydon.........dead. (*Verse 9 : ll. 1-10*)

[The reference here is to a parallel event in the history of pastoral poetry. Bion, a pastoral poet of Smyrna, an imitator of Theocritus, died by poisoning in the second century B C. At this Moschus (flourished about 150 B.C.), a pastoral poet of Syracuse and a pupil of Bion wrote an elegy on the death of his master, entitled "*Lament for Bion*". Bion is also best known for his lament for Adonais, on which the poet Shelley partly modelled his own *Adonais*. In Moschus's *Lament for Bion* he expressed his desire to cross over to the nether world and soften the frowning brow of Pluto and his wife, Proserpine, and to request them to yield back Bion, just as Orpheus had called back his wife Eurydice. Likewise the poet (Arnold) too wishes that like Orpheus and Moschus, he would also attempt to soften the heart of Pluto and Proserpine so that they might be induced to restore his friend (Thyrsis) back to life].

[In Verse 10 Arnold makes his meaning clear when he says that his own elegy on the death of Clough is too feeble and poor a thing, compared with Moschus's famous elegy on the death of his master Bion. So he can scarcely hope to immortalise his friend Clough in these verses.]

"Of the two, Bion seems by far the greater. There is a certain oriental gorgeousness in the *Adonais* that suits the half mythical subject, but the *Lament for Bion* owes more to the intellect than to the heart. Yet it has been imitated not only by Shelley but also by Virgil and Milton, not to speak of Matthew Arnold (A. R. Weekes : *Shelley's Adonais*.)

5. I feel her slowly.........again. (*Verse 14 : ll. 4-10*)

While lamenting the untimely death of his friend, Clough, the poet feels a presentiment of his approaching death. The cold hand of death seems to have stopped the vital spark of life in hand. His cheeks have become thin and his hair has turned grey. He is apt to be reminded of his early youth when he used to wake up early to walk over the dewy fields and when his heart responded to the call of every new emotion arising out of his surroundings. But, unfortunately, all this is changed now.

6. And long....................bare. (*Verse 15 : ll. 1—5*)

While contrasting the present state of his mind with that in his youth, the poet feels that the way to Truth which appeared short in youth now appears too long. He fondly believed that Truth was like a majestic queen enthorned on the cool heights of a hill-top which could be easily reached. But he now finds that the top has suddenly been enveloped in mist and that the prison of the world is encircling him. So, he can now scarcely hope to attain the height of Truth.

7. Unbreachable............fall. (*Verse 15 : ll. 6—10*)

In these lines Arnold gives expression to characteristic melancholy and pessimism as he longs for death. He feels that the prison of the world is encompassing him like an impregnable fort with its noise and bustle, its gross material interests and bitter struggle for material existence. Just as an invading army makes a vain attempt at taking possession of an impregnable castle, so also, the poet in his attempt to get at the Truth, finds that the barriers of the world are too strong for him and he is unsuccessful. So he would fain embrace death whose visit would be as welcome as that of a friend after a long separation.

"Nothing in Arnold's verse is more arresting than its elegiac element, his native melancholy, its 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of mortal destiny."

8. A fugitive............inspired. (*Verse 21 : ll. 1—10*)

While emphasising the unwearied search for Truth

which characterised the Scholar-Gipsy, the poet says that he too is imbued with the same ideal. Incidentally, the poet visualises the life of a humble seeker after Truth, which is a veritable boon sent by heaven to its devotee in moments of divine inspiration. At first it eludes our grasp and its beneficent light shines in all its glory in moments of inspiration. It does not inhere in riches or rank of honour. It is not a marketable earthly commodity which is made available to us in exchange for filthy lucre. It has to be waited for and sought for unweariedly for years. The seeker after Truth must shun the society of man and pursue his ideal with a single-minded devotion, drawing his inspiration, hope and courage from his own mind. Such was the ideal of the Scholar-Gipsy who pursues his eternal quest urged by the inner impulse. Such is also the life of the poet who is also an ardent follower of Truth.

9. What though............night. (*Verse 23 : ll. 1 – 10*)

A remarkable feature of the early poetry of Clough is its cheerful note its freshness and simplicity. But as soon as the Oxford Movement was inaugurated, Clough's mind was assailed with doubt and he was involved in the theological storm. For this reason his poetry thereafter acquired a melancholy and even pessimistic note. Gradually, however, the religious controversy became so acute that it put too heavy a strain on his mind with the result that his poetic power and impulse was dried up at its very source and he ceased to compose any more poems. Nevertheless, Clough never lost sight of the vision of Truth, although he avoided the company of men till death came upon him.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

[Selected from University Papers]

Q. 1 What circumstances led to the intimacy between the two friends and to the composition of the poem ?

Ans. As the sub-title of the poem tells us, it is a monody, *i.e.*, a poem in which the mourner bewails the death of his friend, Arthur Hugh Clough who died in November, 1861.

As a youth, Clough was a pupil of Thomas Arnold, Head-master of Rugby and father of Matthew Arnold, the poet. Clough entered Balliol College, Oxford, in 1837. He was a promising student, but like Arnold he could get only a second class in the Honours School. Latterly, he was appointed a Tutor and a Fellow of Oriel. Both Arnold and Clough were together at Oxford from 1845 to about 1848 and became intimate friends. In the familiar grounds of Oxford the poet and his friend shared a common social experience and became intimate. They walked together in the countryside and regarded the elm-tree which was a familiar landmark to all the walkers, but to the two friends the tree was the symbol of the immortality of the Scholar-Gipsy which was the subject-matter of his famous poem written in 1853 by Arnold.

Very soon Arnold found in Clough "the restless movement of the critical intellect trying to solve the problems" of the age. He believed that if the critical spirit predominated, it would tend to split up the whole personality into segments, thereby incapacitating it for poetry. Soon, their "relationship grew less and less fertile until by 1853 it was an affectionate formality." Arnold did not like the poetry of Clough. He thought Clough had mistaken the whole function and method of poetry. Once Arnold wrote to Clough, "I doubt your being an

artist." The rift between the two friends in their friendship which began in 1845 when Arnold was also elected Fellow of O·iel, now became a real one by 1853.

Owing to the predominance of the critical instinct in Clough, he was deeply influenced by the theological controversies of the time, initiated by what is known as the Oxford Movement, which disturbed the placid atmosphere of the University. Clough could not accept the unquestioning attitude of his friend. So, ultimately, he resigned a fine position as Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College on account of religious diffi:ulties and left Oxford. After leaving Oxford, Clough was appointed Warden to the University Hall, London, Examiner in the Education Office and Secretary to a Commission of Military Schools. His health subsequently broke down in 1859, and on November 13, 1861, he died at Florence, after his continental tour undertaken for reasons of health.

After Clough's death, the *Daily Mews* and Mrs. Clough asked Arnold for a contribution to the columns of the newspaper but Arnold declined to do so. He also declined to write a memoir for Mrs. Clough's edition of her husband's prose works. All these years he was evidently thinking of attempting something in the line of pastoral poetry He had meant to undertake the work of commemorating his friend's death by composing of monody at Oxford in the spring of 1863. But it took about five years after his friend's death before he could embark on the work, which was completed in 1866 and published in Macmillan's Magazine for April. "*Thyrsis*" is thus "a lament not for a dead friend but also for a dead friendship."

Q. 2. What is a pastoral elegy ? To what extent was Arnold influenced by classical models in his 'Thyrsis' ? Mention some noted pastoral elegies in English literature ? *(C.U., B.A. Hons., 1947)*

Ans. Pastoral poetry had its origin in the classical poets of ancient Greece, *viz.*, Theocritus, Bion and Moschus. It was lyric in character and dealt with the simple life of shepherds and their day to day occupations,

such as singing with their oaten pipes in the flowery meadows, piping as though they would never be old, tending their flock of sheep." The essence of pastoral poetry is simplicity of thought and action in a rustic setting.

Theocritus, the great Greek pastoral poet. lived in the 3rd century B.C. He was the creator of bucolic, *i.e.*, pastoral poetry. His idylls present picturesque descriptions of scenes in the lives of shepherds in a rustic setting. the models of pastoral poetry which were the finest examples of such poetry in the literature of Greece, were subsequently imitated by Virgil and others in Roman literature. Virgil wrote imitations of the pastorals of Theocritus in his *Eclogues or Bucolics*.

Theocritus's example in pastoral elegy was followed by Bion in the latter's epic poem entitled *The Dirge of Adonais*, the style of which is refined and versification fluent and elegant. The English poet Shelley modelled his *Adonais* another pastoral elegy commemorating the death of John Keats, on Bion. Moschus, a pupil of Bion, wrote a pathetic lament on death of his master in about 150 B.C.

In England, Edmund Spenser first brought out his *Shepherd's Calendar* with the revival of interest in classics with the Renaissance. "It was modelled on the artificial pastoral popularised by the Renaissance and inspired by Virgil and Theocritus." He was then followed by Milton whose *Lycidas*, in which he bewailed the loss of a fellow shepherd in a person of Edward King, was the precursor of Shelley's *Adonais*. Tennyson's *In Memorium*, written to commemorate his friend Hallam and Arnold's *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar-Gipsy*.

Verses 9, 10 and 11 of *Thyrsis* contain a direct reference to Moschus's *Lament for Bion* in which Moschus attempts to bring back Boin back to life by melting the hearts of Pluto and Proserpine, a Sicilian maid, through his poetry in the Doric dialect. Arnold also borrows the conventional names of shepherds, *e.g.*, Thyrsis and Corydon, Daphnis from Theorcritus and makes a mention of a shepherd's holiday meaning the loss of poetic power. Here

Corydon is the poet, Arnold himself, whereas Thyrsis is the poet's friend, Clough. Besides these, there is also a reference to the poetic contest between the two shepherds in Arnold's elegy, as in Moschus. There is also a distinct echo of a Roman poet, Virgil, who in his seventh *Eclogue* refers to poetic contest between Thyrsis and Corydon in which the latter defeated the former, but in the particular case described by Arnold, Thyrsis has been defeated not by his friend, Corydon (the poet himself) but by death. Just as all pastoral poetry written strictly according to classical models presents a picture of idyllic simplicity and sincerity so does *Thyrsis* place before us an idealised picture of Oxford and the country around with their human associations with Clough and the poet, Arnold. Thus though we have in *Thyrsis* all the external conventional apparatuses of bucolic poetry of classical models, we do not have any close imitation of its original models in form, mode of treatment of subject matter, the local colour which is distinctly English, the thought-structure and the music which are definitely the poet's own.

"The indebtedness of the poem to Theocritus, save for the name *Thyrsis* and the references in the ninth, tenth, eleventh and nineteenth stanzas is of a very general sort, quite different from Shelley's debt in *Adonais* to Bion and Moschus. Arnold probably meant to confess nothing more than the influence upon him of the straightforward, unadorned style of the rural idylls of Theocritus. His attitude to Nature, particularly his love of flowers and of familiar hill-sides, is certainly not derived from the Sicilian. His love of botany was both ardent and technical, as any reader of his letters knows ; has genial scorn of men without botany is a family tradition. He needed neither Theocritus nor Virgil to tell him "what white, what purple fritillaries" grew by Eusham or by Sanford. The images of the poem, as he himself remarks, are English, all from actual observation ; and he is aware that his elegy as a whole is far different from such as Dorian shepherd sang to Proserpine." (Lowry & Tinker : *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold*.)

Q. 3. Comment on the local colour in 'Thyrsis'.

Or

"Many critics call 'Thyrsis' but 'a cold memorial', as it is more 'an embodiment of Oxford' than a memorial on Clough." Discuss. *(C.U., M.A. 1958)*

Ans. The real attraction of the poem lies in the description of Oxford and the country round it, the scenes of 'their jocund youthful time' and its youthful Oxonian spirit. Arnold laments the death of Clough not so much as a dear personal friend or a fellow-poet (for latterly there was a rift between their friendship which remained to the last as "affectionate formality' and the poet was not much enthusiastic about Clough's poetry) as "the embodiment of Oxford". The poem is full of graphic descriptions of the topography of the Oxford country, which is the scene where it is localised. "To lovers of Oxford this poem and the *Scholar-Gipsy* are specially dear as having caught and handed on so much of the genus loci (*i.e.* the genius of the place) the Colleges, the studies, the sports, festivities, the rivers, the flowers and pleasant folk and place-names of the surrounding country." (Fowler). "The country dear to Arnold was very quiet country. Hinksey and Cumner, the haunts of his youth and mine, to which he always returned on his visits to Oxford, were not what are called beauty-spots. They were merely uplands of ancient pasture, down some of which, by the time of *Thyrsis*, the ploughboy's team had already gone ; with a bit of woodland, a wide outlook over Oxford itself and the surrounding villages, and little footpaths running from farm to farm beneath high hedges. You may taste such quietness in any part of England still, if you care to leave the roadway." (Watts : *Arnold Poetry and Prose.*)

Thus, mountains, lakes, roads, rivers in the country around Oxford are portrayed with precision. He has given a new life to the localities such as Cumner, Wych wood, Hinksey, Bagley Wood, Godstow and Bablock Hythe which he has described in the poem with accuracy. The foundation of his accuracy is seen in the loving

minuteness with which in his letters Arnold notes the facts of nature."(Hugh Walker). "The river Thames bends northwards, and turns to the south shortly afterwards. The loop is caused by the intervention of a line of low hills running nearby, north and south of a distance of about six miles, round which the river makes its course, being the beautifully wooded hill of Wytham, to the south of which after sinking almost to the level of the plain, the ground rises again to the heights of Cumner Hurst and Boars Hills, whence it slopes down again to Abing. don. This is the Cumner range, hills never quite rising to a height of 550 feet and cultivated up to the summit of the ridge. The top of Boars Hill from which there are fine views of the river valley and of the Berkshire Downs to the south is a favourite object of walk from Oxford."

The whole poem is thus a revelation of rural beauty and charm—a picture of the quiet aspects of nature which was in perfect accord with Arnold's mood or turn of mind—"a treasury of picturesque and poetical memories"—which would otherwise have passed unnoticed.

Q. 4. Discuss the autobiographical element in "Thyrsis." (*C.U., B.A. Hons., 1956*)

Ans. The autobiographical element, *i.e.*, personal note is present in the poem throughout with a tinge of pathos and melancholy. Arnold is essentially an elegiac poet and his elegiac temper pervades his monody on the death of his friend, Clough, from beginning to end. "His poetry, profoundly melancholy, runs from the world, runs from it, as I think, hurt, hurt in some vital part. It believes itself able to sustain life only in the shade." (Gareod : *Poetry and Criticism of Life.*) "It is not too much to say that there is no other English poet in whom the elegiac spirit reigns as it does in him. He found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the "Virgilian" over the mournfulness of moral destiny." (Hugh Walker : *Literature of the Victorian Era*).

Visiting Oxford after his friend's death, the poet notices that a lamentable change has come over Oxford and the country side in regard to the once familiar man-made

landmarks while the hoary and age-old hills remained unchanged. He feels that a light has gone out of the place by the death of his friend. As he wanders about the place, his memory travels back to their student life at Oxford, which looks very lovely with her towers of Colleges in the faint light of the moon in the evening. He remembers how in their University days they "assayed their shepherd-pipe" by experimenting on their first attempt at pastoral poetry. He fails to trace in the darkness of his evening the foot-track leading to the elm-tree which was once the symbol of the immortality of the Scholar-Gipsy. Much to his regret he subsequently discovers that the tree is missing. His poetic inspiration having now left him, he is now forced to enjoy a shepherd's holiday. He remembers how it was here that he often engaged himself in a poetic contest with his friend, Clough and had occasion to beat him in poetic rivalry. His friend's death has left him without a poetic rival to contend with. A glory has passed away from the once familiar landmarks. The poet's only hope is to commemorate his friend through this elegy with the hope that he too like Moschus, may attempt to persuade Pluto and his consort to restore his friend (Clough) back to life. But he apprehends that his elegy is a poor one and he can scarcely hope to immortalise his friend, Clough, through this means.

With the death of Thyrsis the poet has a presentiment of the shadow of coming death closing in on him. He is aging fast His hair is silvered over with age. The impetuous rash of life seems to be drying up at its very source. He is no longer gifted with such poetic power as would help him to respond to every emotion evoked by the physical or social environment.

In his youth the way to Truth seemed short and easy of access but now he regrets to find that Truth, enthroned on the top of the hill, is swept by wind and clouds. He feels that the prison of the world is encircling him and he is hemmed in from all sides. In these circumstances, he would fain welcome death. The very next moment the poet says that he will not despair so long as the elm-tree,

symbolical of the search of Truth, stands. The voice of his dear friend will continue to inspire him in the quest of Truth till the last day of his life. He will therefore march on in this quest till his death.

Q. 5. What Picture and opinion of Clough and his poetry has Arnold given in 'Thyrsis' ? Has Arnold done full justice to his subject-matter, viz., Clough ?
(C.U., M.A., 1950)

Ans. Arnold recalls his student life at Oxford where both he and his friend, Clough, became at first intimate and had a pleasant time together. Clough was a great lover of the Oxford country. It was there that the two friends first tried their hands at the composition of poetry. But with the inauguration of the Oxford Movement a bitter controversy raged over Oxford. This cast a shadow of doubt over the erstwhile placid and academic atmosphere of the University. Clough continued to compose poems but his subsequent poetry lost its pristine freshness and joy. It struck a deep note of melancholy, which reflected his troubled spirit. This contrast becomes evident if we compare the two poems of Clough, *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* and *Dipsychus*. Clough had been a Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College. So with scrupulous conscientiousness that always characterised him he resigned this fine post on account of his failure to subscribe to the faith in Roman Catholicism and the religious difficulties consequent on this, and left Oxford, in disgust. He signalised this step not by any weighty manifestation of his feelings, but by a mirthful pastoral, viz., *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* which was published in 1848. "I rejoice to see before me, he wrote, "the end of my servitude,yea, even as the weary foot-traveller rejoices at the sight of his evening hostelry, though there still lies a length of dusty road between."

The *Bothie* is a pastoral full of delightful pictures of Nature, which shows the fressness of his mind and outlook and the depth of his communion with the Spirit of the Highlands. "It was his first long poem, and gives us a just view of his capabilities and temperament. For

all its play of humorous fancy there is a deep underlying seriousness in the poem." When, however, we compare this poem with his later work, *viz.. Dipsychus,* we notice for the first time a tinge of melancholy owing to doubts and uncertainties in religious matters which had filled his mind with despair. His delicate spiritual feeling and intellectual hesitancy are clearly reflected in this poem.

Arnold pays a tribute to his friend's unwearied search for Truth while at Oxford. It was during his cheerful and buoyant days of youth, when the theological storm of the Oxford Movement had not burst that Clough attained the highest point of poetical power, as the poems written by Clough during this period were admittedly his best. Even when the religious controversy was raging, Clough continued to write but his poetry lost its pastoral freshness, simplicity and joy and assumed a troubled note. Ultimately, however, Clough's poetic impulse was exhausted but he continued his quest for Truth after leaving Oxford in sheer disgust till death came upon him.

Clough died on November 13, 1861. *Thyrsis* was composed nearly five years after this. Clough was no doubt the hero of the elegy. But it is pertinent to ask : What kind of hero is he ? Does Clough occupy the same dominating position in *Thyrsis* as the heroes of two other comparable elegies in English literature, *viz.*, Edward King in Milton's *Lycidas* and Keats in Shelley's *Adonais* do ? It will be pertinent to quote here what Trilling has got to say about this in his book on "*Matthew Arnold*" on page 296 : *Thyrsis* is in some ways a strange commemoration. Not that it gives but one side of Clough, the troubled side, but that it celebrates the weakness of that side. Its theme is that "Thyrsis of his own will went away, unable to wait out the high winds of doctrine." Evidently Arnold's object was not the commemoration of Clough and his contributions—the prophet side of Clough —but his association with the Oxford country and the mental conflict that sent Clough away from Oxford. "Matthew Arnold was conscious that, in *Thyrsis*, he had too much left out Clough, that the man was not there, or

that he had not made him sufficiently real. So conscious was he that he could bring himself to send a copy of them of Mrs. Clough. But if he has not made Clough live for us, at least he has expressed, in the perfect art with which the Oxford countryside is delineated, a living scene. This truth of scenes gives to *Thyrsis* an element of beauty wanting in our great elegies." "Garrod : *Poetry and the Criticism of Life*).

Q. 6. Write a brief critical appreciation of Arnold's 'Thyrisis'. (*C.U., M.A., 1933*)

Ans. *Thyrsis* is a pastoral elegy, written to commemorate the poet's friend, Clough, Friendship inspired his art, as it had inspired Tennyson's (in his *In Memorium* in memory of Hallam) and Shelley's (*Adonias* which is a monody on his fellow-poet Keats). Friendship, the charm of Oxford, and the spell of the Thames—all these potent inspirations to Arnold meet and blend in *Thyrsis* and in the companion poem *The Scholar-Gipsy*, which rank among his best achievements.

Being an elegy, *i. e.*, a song of lamentation, a note of melancholy pervades the thoughts and sentiments expressed in it. It strikes a poignant personal note also, which arises from the fact that by the death of his friend a light has gone away from the scenes of Oxford and the countryside, where the poet was associated together during their University days and where they made their first attempts at pastoral poetry.

But it would not be ture to say that the poem is a monody, founded solely on poetic friendship as between Arnold and Clough. Arnold was not on terms of closest intimacy with Clough, as there were temperamental and other differences between them. It is a fact that we have too little about Clough. As the poet, who is himself a severe critic of his own poems, says, "It had long been in my head to connect Clough with that Cumner country, and when I began I was carried "irresistibly into this form ; you (J. C. Sharp) say, truly, however that there is much in Clough the whole *prophet* side, in fact, which none cannot deal with in this way, and one has the

feeling if one reads the poems as a memorial aim, that not enough is said about Clough in it...Still Clough had his idyllic side, too ; to deal with this suited my desire to deal again with the Cumner country anyway only so could I treat the matter this time." (Letter to J C. Sharp). Arnold's aim in writing the poem was ostensilby to depit Clough and to commemorate his poetic friendship with him but really to record his association with the country round Oxford. The real charm of the poem lies in the description of the Highlands and above all, in its youthful Oxonian spirit. The elegy may truly described, as Prof. Elton has done, as an example of associative poetry, centering round a place or person or both, like his other poem. *The Scholar-Gipsy* written thirteen years ago.

The poem follows the conventional form of pastoral elegy, employing, as it does, the imagery of the shepherd's life, names of shepherds (Thyrsis, Corydon and Daphnis), the simple life of the mountain shepherds and their occupations, *viz.*, singing with their oaten pipes, tending the sheep etc., in the woods and hill-sides. For all these things the poet was indebted to Theocritus, Bion and Moschus. The tenth and eleventh veres allude to Moschus's *Lament for Bion*. But the imitation of the originals does not extend to the images, which are based on the poet's personal observations, the rural English atmosphere, the thought and the music. All these were the poet's own. His elegy as a whole is thus for different from such as the Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine. "Arnold confessed nothing more than the influence upon him of the straight forward style of the rural idylls of Theocritus. His attitude to nature and his love of flowers and of familiar hill-sides of the Oxford country were all hls own." (Tinker & Lowry : *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold.*)

The meter of the poem is an adaptation of Keat's Odes specially of the *Ode to the Nightingale.* The ten-lined stanza rhymed *ababcadeed* is one of the most suitable metrical inventions of the Victorian age, employed by Arnold. "In Arnold's stanza the shortened line, with its suggestion

of weariness and exhaustion, comes earlier, in the sixth place instead of the eighth, but in compensation for this, three rhymes are launched at once and the rhyme is the first to be repeated, the *a* being held over for the short line, a more intricate and compact weave, which is fitly rounded off by the closed quatrain which follows."—(Enid Homer).

"Of the four great elegies, *viz*, Milton's *Lycidas*, Tennyson's *In Memorium*, Shelley's *Adonais* and Arnold's *Thyrsis*, the last is the most natural and human, which has never been obscured by ambitious efforts of art or by philosophic reflection as in Tennyson and Shelley, If *Thysis* had no other merits, yet its art in landscape and the fine sentiment with which it particularises—these two talents alone—might vindicate for Matthew Arnold a place with the greatest poets." (Garrod : *Poetry and the Criticism of Life*).

In style we notice its exquisite classical grace, order, simplicity, clarity, tranquillity, restraint and proportion —its artless dictum—qualities which are not quite paralleled by anything in English literature except Arnold's own poem, *The Scholar-Gipsy.*

Arnold loved nature in her quieter and more subdued moods and he was a very keen observer of all the phenomena of Nature His descriptions of Nature are very minute and accurate. *Thyrsis* is full of such accurate pictures of natural scenes. The prevailing mood of Arnold in his description of Nature is that of serenity except when he is describing the terrible aspect of Nature as when he gives us an accurate picture of 'some tempestuous morn in early June' in *Thyrsis* in the sixth stanza. On the whole, *Thyrsis* is one of the greatest elegies in English poetry and takes its place among the three other great English elegies discussed above.

Q. 7. What "criticism of life" **do you think 'Thyrsis' offers ?** *(C. U., B. A. Hons. 1930)*

Ans. Poetry, according to Arnold, is to be regarded as a "criticism of life" which can mean only that it is an interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the

mind of the interpreter." (Hudson : *Introduction to the Study of Literature*, p. 15). His poetry is therefore critical of life, *i.e.*, life of the age in which he lived, the life of his country and the lives of individual men. He considered that as a poet it was his duty to see life steadily and as a whole so as to be able to arrive at a Proper understanding and integration of the complex modern life of his days, full of conflicts—between spontaneity and discipline, emotion and reason, faith and scepticism, mad craze for money-making and other worldliness and such other disease of modern life.

Thyrsis also offers us a criticism of life, *i.e.*, a solution of the complicated problem of modern life which vex the mind of the poet and his friend torn by conflicts temprest-tost and likely to be cut off from their moorings in an age in which owing to the prevailing uncertainties, one is likely to become a sceptic through lack of faith. The remedy to this strange disease of modern life is to have like the Scholar-Gipsy "one aim, one business, one purpose". The genuine seeker of Truth must shun the society of men like the Scholar-Gipsy and dedicate himself to the quest of truth, in the quiet bosom of Nature which is permanat as against the restiess movement and changes in man-made things. Truth is not like an earthly commodity which can be had in exchange for wealth. It ever eludes our grasp and yields only when the beneficent light from heaven illumines suddenly the mind of the devotee as in a flash.

In *Thyrsis* we notice, as elsewhere, especially in *The Scholar-Gipsy* "that the poet is moved easily and to the very depths of his being by a sense of tears in mortal things by an insatiable hunger of the human spirit for a sustaining faith and knowledge and by a yearning for spiritual calm and poise. We notice also that his "ample spirits" as a last desperate resource found a haven of rest and serenity in the quiet beauty of Nature in the midst of the turmoils, doubts and distractions of his age. "Arnold's serenity is the quiet seclusion of a melancholy soul" who found solace in the healing power of Nature. This is the message of *Thyrsis*.

Q. 8. How good a "criticism of life" is Matthew Arnold's 'Thyrsis'? *(Agra U., M.A., 1965)*

Ans. See answer to Question 7 and Article 6 (d) under Introduction (p. 14).

Q. 9. "There is perhaps as much about Clough in 'Thyrsis' as there is about Edward King in 'Lycidas' or about Keats in Adonais". Discuss.

(Agra U., M.A., 1955)

Ans. *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy of Milton on the death of his college friend, Edward King. In this poem "Milton represents himself as a shepherd bewailing the loss of a fellow shepherd". Both the shepherds were "nursed upon the self-same hill, fed the same flock by fountain, shade and rill." This image is sustained throughout the elegy which follows the traditional pastoral form.

In this elegy the poet expresses his personal relations with Lycidas (Edward King) under the veil of pastoral language as members of the same college where they had the same pursuits, had walks together and composed poems together. The poet then expresses his own sense of loss: All nature mourns his loss. Then the poem concludes somewhat in the following strain: "As the sun sinks into the sea in the evening but rises again in the morning with renewed beauty, so Lycidas sank low into the sea but rose again through the saving power of Christ, to take his place in Christ." The poem ends in a strain of joy and hope, for Lycidas cannot be annihilated.

Shelley's *Adonais* is one of the noblest elegies in the English language. It is modelled directly on Moschus's *Lament for Boin* as well as on Milton. It is also cast in pastoral form. It is inspired by the tragic death of Keats. But it is more concerned with the poet Shelley himself than with Keats. Besides Shelley also laments the loss to poetry by the death of Keats.

Shelley begins with a lament for Adonais (Keats. The hour of his death is distinguished from others by the melancholy events of the death of Keats. The fame of *Adonais* in the poetic world will serve as a beacon-light for

many ages to come. Then a train of mourners including Byron, the pilgrim of eternity and the poet, Shelley himself comes forward to mourn the death of Adonais. Here begins a rather long digression on Shelley himself and on reviewers who have killed Adonais. Lastly, the poet bursts into a final note of joy and triumph because Adonais cannot die but has become a part of the Eternal Soul. Thus, Shelley strikes a note of philosophical optimism.

Arnold's *Thyrsis* is a direct descendant of *Lycidas* through Gray's *Elegy*. In both poems the poets do not merely confine themselves to the mourning over dead friends but incidentally give their views of life. We cannot find in *Lycidas* the keen sense of personal loss in Tennyson's *In Memorium* nor the sustained scorn and bitter invectives against reviewers in Shelley's *Adonais*. "But in its tender regret for a dead friend, in its sweet touches of idealised rural life, in its glimpses of a suppressed passion that was soon to break forth, and in its mingling of a truly religious spirit with all its classical imagery, it reveals to us the greatness of the poetic genius of Milton."

As we have seen, there is very little about Clough in Arnold's *Thyrsis*. Nobody was more conscious about this than Arnold himself. "It gives but one side of Clough—the troubled side and not the prophet-side—but that it celebrates the weakness of that side. Its theme is that "Thyrsis of his own will went away, unable to wait out the high winds of doctrine." At first, Arnold's relation with Clough was more intimate than Shelley's with Keats, though latterly there was a rift in the friendship between Arnold and Clough. Shelley was not on terms of intimacy with Keats with whom he had temperamental differences. That is why there is not much of Keats and Clough in both the poems and as memorial poems, both fail. But perhaps the grief of Arnold for Clough is more poignant than that of Shalley for Keats.

Q. 10. Show that 'Thyrsis' is less an elegy on Clough than a description of contemporary life with its feverishness, its 'sick hurry' and its 'divided aims'

(*Agra U., M.A., 1958*)

Ans. Supplement answer to Question 3 above by the following passage—

In Arnold's representative poems there are recurrent references to—

"this stange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry and divided aims
Its heads o'er-taxed and palsied heart......

and to this age that

had bound
Our souls in its benum being round

and

this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears

and—

Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
which much to have tried, in much been baffled,
brings.

O life unlike to ours !
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he
strives.
And each half-lives a hundered different lives,
Who wait like thee, but not, like three in hope."

—*The Scholar-Gipsy.*

The deep note of melancholy and recurrent pessimism are also characteristic features of *Thyrsis*. "He found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of mortal destiny. It is the natural tone of an agnostic who is not jubilant, but regretful of the vanished faith—regretful of its beauty and regretful of the lost promise. (Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*)

Supplement your answer by para 2 of answer to Question 7 here.

Q. 11. 'Thyrsis' is a very beautiful poem, not much less beautiful than Adonais, though very unlike it......But Keats is near to every one of us : while Clough is already far away". Discuss.

(*Agra U., M. A*, 1956)

Ans. *Thyrisis* is admittedly considered by critics to be one of the greatest elegies in English poetry. It is fit to take its place among the three other great elegies *viz.*, *Lycidas*, *Adonais* and *In Memorium*. Though it fails to commemorate Clough, it has other qualities which distinguished it from other elegies. "In fact there is as much about Clough in *Thyrsis* as there is about Edward King in *Lycidas*, or about Keats in *Adonais*. The real tribute to the poet consists in the value of the poem itself, and not in the references to Clough.

Let us now compare and contrast *Thyrsis* and *Adonais*. Certain superficial resemblances between the two poems become atonce apparent. Both are pastoral elegies modelled on Moschus's *Lament for Bion* employing the conventional apparatuses and forms of classical pastoral elegies, *viz.*, the imagery of shepherd's life, the physical setting, such as woods, hills, caves and their echoes, the references to poetic contests etc. Just as Shelley was not on terms of intimate friendship with Keats, with whom he had temperamental differences, Arnold's relation with Clough was also during the last days of the latter not so intimate, as there was rift in their friendship.

But the differences between the two elegies are more real than apparent. In the first place, the scenes described in *Thyrsis* are based on Arnold's personal observation and the real charm of the poem lies in the description of the Highlands and its youthful Oxonian spirit. It is the local colour of the poem which makes the grief expressed so poignant. Surely Shelley's elegy can advance no such claim. We look in vain for such beautiful description of Nature in *Adonais* as we find in *Thyrsis*. Nature in *Adonais* is too shadowy and looked at figuratively. Secondly, *Thyrsis* is genuinely and more profoundly elegiac than *Adonais*. The reality of the scenes is associated with depth of feeling with which they are described. As the poet has himself remarked, "It is solid and sincere." A truly elegiac tinge of melancholy is the dominant note in *Thyrsis*. although it is brightened up at the very end by a ray of hope in the darkness of despair and scepticism. *Adonais* does not leave us in a mood of utter despair and sorrow.

By a subtle process Shelley converts sorrow into joy and even triumph when he says towards the end of the poem that Adonais is not dead, as he has become a part of the Eternal Soul. In *Thyrsis* also Arnold speaks of the soul of Thyrsis as being mingled with Nature but the dominant note here is one of despair because Truth cannot be attained on earth. It is this which paralysed the action of the poem. In *Adonais* likewise the soul of Adonais, like a star, is beaconing to the poet in his voyage of eternity. This is the triumphant note of hope and joy which is a marked feature of *Adonais* while *Thyrsis* is a picture of unrelieved gloom and depair.

Q. 12. "Arnold is the greatest of English poets in the department of elegy and reflection". (*H. W. Garrod*) **Discuss.** (*Agra U., M. A., 1958*)

Discuss Arnold's melancholy. (*Agra U , M.A., 1958*)

Ans. See Introduction 6 (c)—*His melancholy and elegiac poetry* (p. 13).

Q. 13. Discuss the influence of Oxford on Arnold with special reference to Thyrsis.

(*Agra U., M.A.,* 1956)

Ans. See Introduction and answer to Question 3.

Q. 14. Show that there is too much thought, too much philosophy of life in Arnold's poems to make them profitable reading for the very young.

(*Agra U., M. A.,* 1957)

Ans. Young children generally like poems specially written for them. They like poems that tell a story, full of amusing, interesting dramatic situations and humour, and point to a moral, as for example Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin.*

Arnold has written no such poem. For a just apnraisal of his poetry, it is necessary to understand how he was shaped by the influences of his age. His poems give complete expression of one great phase of nineteenth century thought which may very well be described as "scepticism" and intellectual doubt and distrust as a kind of natural reaction against the facile optimism of believers

in science. The Victorians lived in an atmosphere of "violent uncertainty", as the discoveries of science, glorious as they were, shook religous opinion and drove some of them to atheism. Arnold was the mouthpiece of all such vexed souls of his age. By virtue of his temperament and training, example of his illustrious father, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, his scho arship, Arnold was critical rather than emotional, intellectual, reflective and philosophical rather than passionate and sentimental. Although it would not be correct to say that his poetry is the poetry of a critic the critic in him often aided and acted in unison with the poet. His view of poetry was that it must have interpretative power, its object being to bring us into harmony with life, to explain life and to tell us how to live. According to him, his age was wanting in moral grandeur and as such, unfit for great poetry. This over-emphasis on the underlying morality of great poetry surely narrows down the range and scope of poetry which, as we know, has to do with non-moral ideas if it is to be true to life. To him the Victorian age was an age of mental strife—of "sick hurry" and "divided aims" and there was a break up of old faith and tradition due to the impact of materialism. It is this intellectual interest of the age which seems to have stricken

most of Arnold's poetry with a kind of palsy. Because of the fact that the intellectual and philosophical elements play a dominant role in his poems, his poetry has a selected *clientele*, *viz.*, scholars, as their appeal is invariably to the cultivated tastes of the educated classes. Arnold was too intellectual to yield himself to a lyrical abandon and effusion in his poetry. The unpremeditated lyrical outburst of a Shelley was beyond him, and all his poems are the expression of an intellectual emotion arising out of man's sad mortality, a sense of tears in mortal things and a consequential hunger of the human spirit for a sustaining religion—a yearning for a spiritual calm and poise. The elegiac vein—"the eternal note of sadness—sounds with a deep cadence in nearly all his poems. He was drawn towards the ancient Greek models in epic and drama by his temperament, and classical scholarship.

"Not since Milton has there been any English poet more deeply imbued with the classical spirit." "Balanced and austere by temperament, he writes in a style marked by classical severity along with lucidity and grace."

The *Scholar-Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* are two of his poems which reveal most of his mind and most of the characteristics of his poetry—his intellectual passion, his "criticism of life", his melancholy, his Hellenism, his disappointment over the frustration of modern life, his yearning for a spiritual calm and his love for the quiet beauty of the country-side. In the *Scholar Gipsy* he severely condemns the modern age in which he lived by contrasting it with the poetic world of the pastoral and the primitive ages of faith and happiness, through the elusive figure of the Scholar-Gipsy with his Oxford culture, his shy and gentle manners, devoting himself to a quest of "a fugitive and glorious light." In *Thyrsis* he offers a solution to "this strange disease of modern life" and the trangled problems that worried the troubled soul of his dead friend and brother poet, Arthur Hugh Clough. His prescription of a remedy to the disease of modern life is enjoyment of Nature which alone can cure the heart-aches of "contention-test man" in the absence of faith.

In *Dover Beach* he strikes a note of sadness when he comparos man an to ignorant army clashing in darkness. Having lost faith, man's life on earth is enveloped in the darkness of despair and scepticism and lost in the gloom without knowing its meaning and purpose. "*Dover Beach* is thus a profoundly melancholy poem, expressing the peculiar turn of Arnold's mind, atonce religious and sceptical, philosophical and emotional."

In his philosophical poem *Empedocles on Etna* too the poet pictures the dilemma of his time through his mouthpiece, Empedocles, the'sceptical philosopher' and one time very powerful in Sicily but now 'the weary man, the banished citizen', climbs his way to the summit of Etna and reasons his way from despair to suicide; at the same time musing on man's sad lot and the fate of the soul after death. In the lyric 'Song for Apollo' which occurs in *Empedocles on*

Etna the subject matter is ever the same, *viz*. the sad lot of man on earth and Nature's calm and tranquillity. In his *Memorial Verses* we miss the outburst ef unpremeditated lyric rapture because of the predominance of the intellect over the heart. "There is scarcely any poem of his which is felt to be an outburst of lyrical abandon. "There is doubtless an 'emotion of the intellect' which finds as glowing an utterance in lyric poetry as the emotion of the heart ; but it does not touch us in quite the same way- It is because of this that we miss the thrill which all really passionate lyric poetry forces us to feel." Only in the *Forsaken Merman* does Arnold give himself a loose rein and abandons himself completely to lyrical abandon."

Q. 15. Show from the poems of Arnold that picturesqueness of description and of simile is a marked characteristic of his poetry.

(*Agra U., M. A., 1957*)

Ans. Although Arnold did not spiritualise Nature like Wordsworth he found consolation in Nature and his poetry is full of the same picturesque vividness, quiet beauty with however this difference that he found peace rather than 'joy' in Nature as Wordsworth did. "He loved her in her quieter and more subdued moods ; he preferred her silence...But above everything what he worshipped in Nature was her steadfastness and calm, ever teaching the lesson of self-dependence."

In *The Scholar-Gipsy* he sought quietness, which is evident from the topograpical background of the poem. The quiet countryside of Oxford appealed to him most which is seen in this as well as in *Thyrsis*. It is from the quiet country of Hinksey and Cumner—the region which is so beautifully woven into the texture of these two poems—that the poet draws a kind of *cool* refreshment. The word 'cool' recurs in his poems very frequently, especially when he is describing Nature's beauty so picturesquely. He is very accurate in his descriptions of Nature—mountains, lakes, roads, rivers—and the foundations of this accuracy rest upon the loving minuteness with which Arnold observed them. He loved Nature in her quieter

and more subdued moods. He preferred to describe Nature's silences rather than her noises, *e. g.*, the sea retreating from the 'moon-blanch'd land with its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.' It is the spirit of peace prevailing over Nature that charms him and it is the truth behind the desciptions of Nature that gives to *Thyrsis* and to the *Scholar-Gipsy* the element of beauty, which is sadly lacking elsewhere in other elegies. In both we come across descriptions of lovely landscapes, pictures of gliding Thames, wide meadows dotted with different kinds of flowers, grey villages and misty hills and such other typically English scenes. In *Empedocles on Etna* many of the lovely scenes described are those drenched in moonlight. In the *Forsaken Merman* the Merman creeps to shore

> When clear falls the moonlight
> When spring-tides are low.

In his *Youth of Nature*

> The lake,
> Lovely and soft as a dream
> Swims in the sheen of the moon.

There is no lovelier scene in all his poems than the moonlight scene in *Tristram and Iseult*—

> And far beyond the sparkling trees
> Of the castle park one sees
> The bare heaths clear as day,
> Moor behind moor, far for away,
> Into the heart of Brittany.

In *Thyrsis* the most accurate picture of 'some tempestuous morn in early June' is given in the stanza beginning with—

> So, some tempestuous morn in early June
> When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
> Before the roses and the longest day—
> When garden-walks, and all the glassy floor,
> With blossoms, red and white, of fallen May,
> And chestnut-flowers are strewn—

His employment of long-drawn picturesque similes (called Homeric simile) is also significant. The one in *Thyrsis*

quoted above is characteristic of Arnold. Here the objects compared are the death of Clough and the departure of the cuckoo. The aptness of the simile lies in the fact that as the cuckoo leaves England when the storms begin to blow, so Clough left the world when the religious storm was raging in fury at Oxford. He ends his pastoral (*The Scholar-Gipsy*) with a simile so elaborate that we are taken up with the picture for its own sake, forgetting altogether what it is intended to illustrate. In *Sohrab and Rustum* also he follows a similer plan with a greater justification, for there "the thought of the river losing itself in the vast tranquil sea under the stars reconcile us to the sadness of the story and of human fate."

Arnold's restless spirit found a heaven of rest only in the quiet beauty of Nature and in some of the many passages descriptive of Nature's beauty, he may well challenge comparison with the very best of the romantic poets :

"Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leaf'd, white anemone,
Dark blue-bells drench'd with dews of Summer eves,
And purple orchises with spotted leaves
But none has words she can report of thee."

—*The Scholar-Gipsy.*

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